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AGITATIONS, RIOTS AND THE TRANSITIONAL STATE IN CALCUTTA, 1945-50

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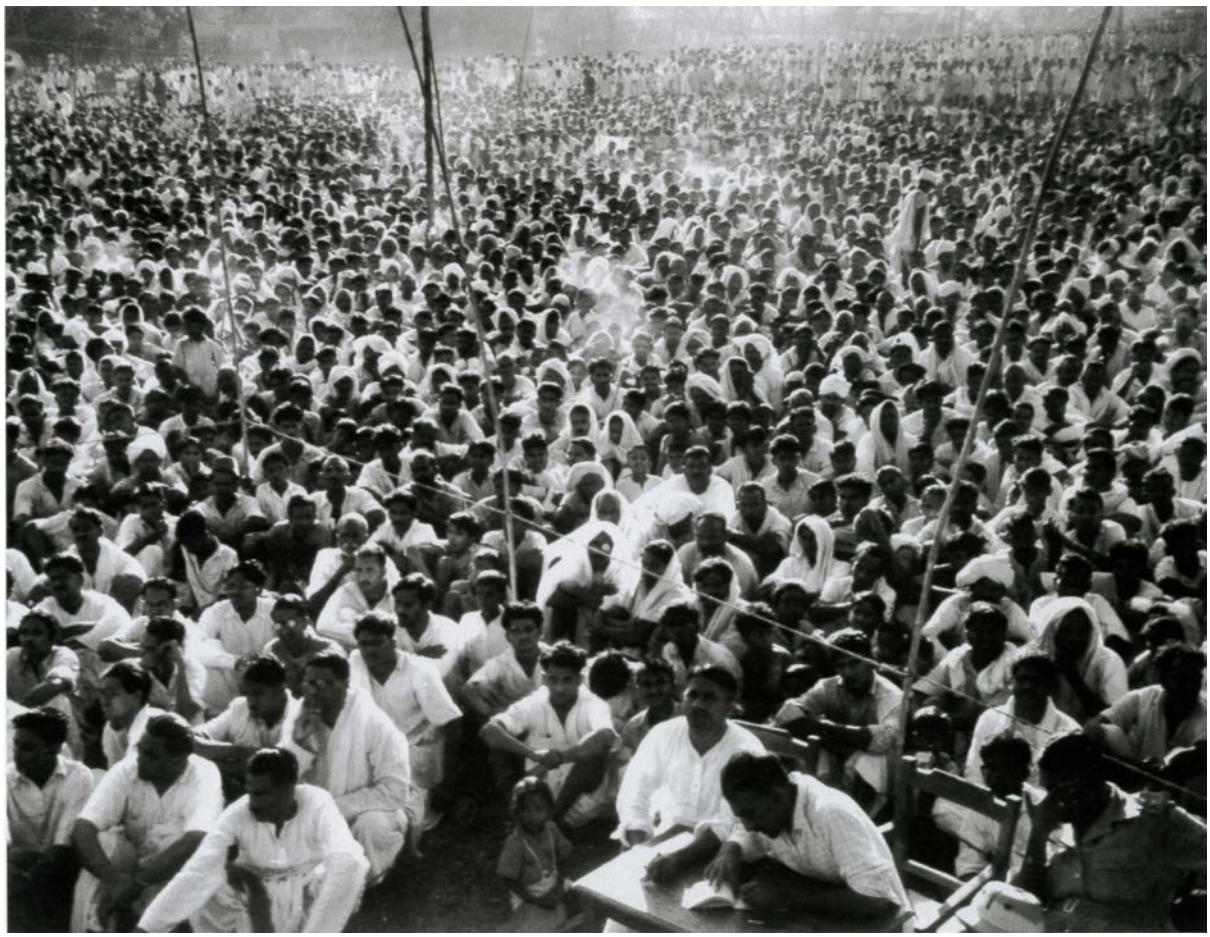

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Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically declared in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution.

This thesis is 74,816 words in length, including the Table of Contents but excluding front matter, footnotes, references and bibliography, as specified by the Degree Committee. Tables and graphs are counted as 150 words each. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit.

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PhD Thesis Summary –

Ishan Mukherjee

AGITATIONS, RIOTS AND THE TRANSITIONAL STATE IN CALCUTTA, 1945-50

The thesis examines the agitations and riots that broke out in Calcutta in the aftermath of the Second World War. Through a close analysis of local outbreaks of urban violence, it hopes to contribute to the understanding of decolonization in the subcontinent. It interrogates existing chronological and conceptual frameworks through which decolonization has been understood in the historiography of the region. At the same time, the study analyses the continuities and changes in the practices of the local state apparatus, especially the police, through the transition 'from the colonial to the post-colonial' regime in South Asia. The scope of the study is limited to incidents and experiences in Calcutta, although it attempts to take into account relevant issues at the regional and all-India level wherever possible.

The historiography of popular politics in South Asia is fairly unanimous in concluding that the immediate aftermath of the Second World War saw widespread 'anti-imperialist' 'cross-communal' protests throughout the subcontinent. In this period, many argue, people of all religions came together for the last time to fight the colonial regime. However, this moment of communal unity was quickly lost as the subcontinent plunged into communal violence on an unprecedented scale. Incidents in Calcutta are believed to exhibit this pattern very clearly. In February 1946 the city witnessed large-scale protests against the conviction of Captain Rashid Ali of the Indian National Army. However, just six months later, Calcutta witnessed massive

communal riots. The Great Calcutta Killing of August 1946 set off the chain of communal violence across the subcontinent that ultimately precipitated the partition of British India into two mutually hostile post-colonial states of India and Pakistan.

This thesis hopes to challenge some of these assumptions in the historiography of decolonization. It seeks to complicate this linear narrative by questioning the 'cross-communal' dimension of the anti-colonial protests. It also argues that the outbreak of communal violence was not as sudden as has been assumed. Rather, communal tension often co-existed with periods of united anti-colonial agitations.

The thesis will also examine inter-community relations in the city in the very first years after independence. It will study how new minorities produced by the Indian nation state grappled with, and were affected by, the changed circumstances in Calcutta.

Abbreviations

ABMSL	All-Bengal Muslim Students League
AICC	All India Congress Committee
AIHM	All India Hindu Mahasabha
AITU	All India Telegraph Union
AITUC	All India Trade Union Congress
BPCC	Bengal Provincial Congress Committee
BPSC	Bengal Provincial Students Congress
BPSF	Bengal Provincial Students Federation
CIO	Central Intelligence Officer
CPI	Communist Party of India
CSP	Congress Socialist Party
DC	Deputy Commissioner
GOB	Government of Bengal
IB, GB, WBSA	Intelligence Bureau, Government of Bengal, West Bengal State Archives
INA	Indian National Army
IOR	India Office Records
KPM	Kolkata Police Museum
MIO	Military Intelligence Officer
NAI	National Archives of India
OC	Officer-in-charge
PM	Political Miscellaneous
RSPI	Revolutionary Socialist Party of India
SB	Special Branch

SBR, CP	Special Branch Records, Calcutta Police
SRPSB	Secret Report on the Political Situation in Bengal
SPI	Socialist Party of India
TP	Transfer of Power
UP	United Provinces
WBLAP	West Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings
WBSA	West Bengal State Archives

Glossary

akhand	undivided
anna	one-sixteenth of an Indian rupee
ashram	hermitage
badmash	ruffian
bhadralok	gentlefolk
bidi	hand-rolled cigarettes usually produced in household bases workshops
bustee	tenement, slum
cutcheri	office, usually of a zamindari or an indigenous business firm
darga	Sufi shrine
ghats	river-bank
goonda	ruffian, thug
gully	(narrow) lane
hartal	strike
julum/zulm	oppression
kafir	infidel
lathi	bamboo stave
laukik rashtra	people's government
mohalla	neighbourhood
narak	hell
parda	veil
pir	Sufi saint
pugree	head-dress made of cloth

sadhu	Hindu saint
saheb	foreigner, European
tamasha	entertainment
thana	police station
zamindar	landlord

Introduction

Bhanu Bose was a notorious member of Calcutta's underworld – a *goonda*.[1] He and his brother, Jagabandhu Bose, both loosely affiliated with the Congress Socialist Party, led a criminal gang in the jurisdiction of Muchipara *thana*[2] in central Calcutta. During the agitation in February 1946 against the conviction of Rashid Ali of the Indian National Army (INA), he allegedly advised his men to kill police sergeants and *sahebs*. This, he explained, would 'help us free India'. Armed with the confession of one of Bhanu's followers, who had testified against him during interrogation, the police arrested him on 5 April 1946. Well-connected as Bhanu was, the police had to set him free in a matter of weeks.[3]

When Calcutta plunged into communal mayhem in August 1946, Bhanu's name surfaced again in police records.[4] He had allegedly struck up an alliance with other powerful *goondas* of the city to join the murderous spree against Muslims. He disappeared from official discussions soon thereafter, and it remains uncertain whether the police ever brought him to book for communal rioting. But he reappeared in police files immediately after India's independence. In September 1947, Gandhi undertook a fast to bring an end to communal violence in Calcutta, urging the city's underworld

[1] For a definition of what colonial officials meant by the term '*goonda*' in the 1940s, see India and Burma Committee – Indian Political Situation: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for India, 15 August 1945, Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon (eds.), *The Transfer of Power, 1942-47: Constitutional Relations between Britain and India*, vol. VI, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1976, no. 28, pp. 70-71. Also see Suranjan Das and J.K. Ray, *The Goondas: Towards a Reconstruction of the Calcutta Underworld*, Calcutta: Firma K.L.M., 1996.

[2] A '*thana*' is a police station. Derived from Indian vernaculars (both Hindusthani and Bengali), it was incorporated within colonial English vocabulary.

[3] K.P.M. No. 01699/05, S.B. File No. 868 (D/7), P.M. (1946), Special Branch Records, Calcutta Police.

[4] Ibid.

operators to surrender their arms. The Muchipara gang split. Jagabandhu Bose submitted himself to the Mahatma's wishes; but Bhanu led a rebel faction and decided to defy Gandhi's call.[5]

Figures like Bhanu Bose sit uncomfortably within Indian historiography, which continues to operate within a 'nationalism' versus 'communalism' binary. This remains the case, despite many examples of individuals like Bhanu Bose who participated in a range of street actions that defy neat separation into either of these categories. This has serious consequences for how historians of popular politics have hitherto understood processes of decolonization in the subcontinent.

A consensus continues to exist among historians that the immediate aftermath of the Second World War generated 'cross-communal' 'anti-colonial' fervour among the public at large. Sumit Sarkar has held that popular mobilization against the INA trials and the rebellion in the Royal Indian Navy were expressions of a post-war anti-imperialist spirit.[6] Gautam Chattopadhyay has gone so far as to suggest that the Rashid Ali agitations, in which Bhanu Bose participated, constituted an 'almost revolution'.[7] For Chattopadhyay, the mass enthusiasm evident in the agitation held out alternative possibilities of India's post-colonial future, which, if taken to its logical conclusion, could have avoided the tragedy of partition.

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[5] K.P.M. No. 01488/05, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1947), Special Branch Records, Calcutta Police.

[6] Sumit Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership, 1945-47', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 17, no. 14/16, Annual Number, April, 1982, pp. 677-689. This article has been reprinted in Sumit Sarkar, *A Critique of Colonial India*, Calcutta: Papyrus, 1985.

[7] Gautam Chattopadhyay, 'An Almost Revolution (A Case Study of India in February 1946)' in Barun De (ed.), *Essays in Honour of Prof. S.C. Sarkar*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1976. Also see Gautam Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt against the Raj, 1945-46' in Amit Kumar Gupta (ed.), *Myth and Reality: The Struggle for Freedom in India, 1945-46*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1987.

Sucheta Mahajan, while critiquing these upsurges as 'premature',[8] agrees that a popular 'anti-colonial' mood was pervasive in the post-war period, expressed in small gestures of support for the nationalist cause expressed by all sections of people throughout the country. On the whole, then, a historiographical agreement prevails that the descent into partition violence was a *sudden* development. This trajectory of popular politics on the eve of India's independence allegedly found most vivid expression in Calcutta, where communal violence 'suddenly' erupted in August 1946 only months after the vigorous, even spectacular, 'cross-communal' and 'anti-colonial' INA agitations.

This thesis challenges these long-held assumptions. It demonstrates how impossible it is to recover a pristine anti-colonial moment untainted by communal antagonism in the last years of colonial rule in India. Gyanendra Pandey has, of course, pointed towards the concurrent histories of nationalism and communalism, both being products of the 'age of Reason and Capital'.[9] He shows how nationalist and colonialist discourse on communalism overlapped and represented the phenomenon as nationalism's 'other'. But elucidation of this entangled history of nationalism and communalism in Pandey's analysis remains at a discursive plane; the empirical case studies he uses to unpack the 'construction of communalism' remain confined to issues that had manifestly sectarian and divisive overtones. Pandey does not use cases that could be integrated into a historiography of any liberal-secular versions of Indian nationalism. In contrast, apart from studying processes of articulation, consolidation and

[8] Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000.
[9] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990.

mobilization of unambiguously communal identities, this research also attempts to reassess some issues and events that have hitherto been narrated in historiography as part of India's heritage of cross-communal anti-colonialism. It shows how their integration into nationalist historiography has only been made possible by oversight or suppression of aspects that would have rendered them unavailable for the mythologies of Indian nationalism.

This study, therefore, approaches the nationalism/communalism dichotomy with different methodologies and questions. It is based on a close examination of everyday state practices and the rich archival records that such practices have produced over a period of about five years, from the end of the Second World War to the first few years after independence. It examines in detail patterns of street mobilization and state action in urban Calcutta during these critical years. Moments of cross-communal solidarity notwithstanding, the study shows how communal antagonism had become ubiquitous, both in spectacular street action and in everyday life, during the last days of the Raj.

The Historiography of 'Mobilization':

The historiography of Indian politics has produced a substantial body of sophisticated literature on 'popular mobilization'. However, despite reformulations over time, this literature continues to remain structured by the nationalism/communalism binary.

In nationalist historiography, popular mobilization in support of nationalist causes is presented as the result of a spontaneous reaction to colonial oppressions. The Indian National Congress, being the largest nationalist organization, was the automatic choice for large sections of Indians who instinctively rallied around Congress leaders when called to action to free the nation from colonial rule.[10] Communal mobilization, in this framework, is the result of certain sections of people being 'misled' by self-seeking leaders of opportunist parties patronized by the British as part of their 'divide-and-rule' policy.[11]

At the other end of the spectrum are historians who have projected nationalist mobilizations primarily as pursuit of self-interest by local elites who strategically mobilized their social subordinates through patron-client relationships and aligned with provincial and all-India leaders to achieve their own ends. The tall leaders of the nationalist movement co-opted such parochial and self-seeking local 'subcontractors' for their own agenda, producing large-scale mass movements that appeared to be unified over a national cause only when observed superficially from a distance. Of course, this historiography varies considerably in range and sophistication. Older studies, such as those of Judith Brown[12] and the early work of Anil Seal,[13] take a largely top-down view of political mobilizations, often reducing these to the result of

[10] Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, Sucheta Mahajan and K.N. Panikkar, *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi: Viking, 1988. Also see Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1981. For a specific discussion of mobilizations in the late colonial period, see Mahajan, *Independence and Partition*.
[11] Ibid. Also see Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1984.
[12] Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics, 1915-1922*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972; Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience: The Mahatma in Indian Politics, 1928-34*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
[13] Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

frustrations and competitions among different types of educated elites perusing their disparate self-interested ends. Latterly, the 'new Cambridge school' has produced very sophisticated studies of local power dynamics, showing how these were mobilized for larger movements and associations at provincial and all-India levels, and revealing their links with the changing structures of colonial governance.[14] Scholars working within this framework have rarely studied communal mobilizations specifically; but when they did so, these were explained as another instance of cobbling together disparate grievances and objectives to further elite interests.[15]

Rejecting both the above trends in Indian historiography for their 'elitist' biases, some scholars have attempted to recover patterns of 'subaltern consciousness' in the vast numbers of disempowered unlettered masses.[16] These scholars argued for a domain of political consciousness and mobilizational potential of the subalterns that even while drawing upon elements of elite politics, remained autonomous from it.[17]

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[14] See, especially, the essays in two edited volumes: John Gallaghar, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (eds.), *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870 to 1940* (Reprinted from *Modern Asian Studies*), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973; Christopher Baker, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (eds.), *Power, Profit and Politics: Essays on Imperialism, Nationalism and Change in Twentieth Century India* (Reprinted from *Modern Asian Studies*), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

[15] This is at least one reading of Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

[16] For a manifesto-like presentation of the Subaltern Studies project, see Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982. Also see Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Delhi; Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983. For an earlier study of Congress mobilization along similar lines, but prior to the launch of the Subaltern Studies project, see Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926-34: A Study in Imperfect Mobilization*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

[17] For example, some of these scholars have shown how Gandhi was reconfigured in 'subaltern consciousness' to produce idioms of politics that had nothing to do with what Gandhi thought, said or did. See Shahid Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-2' in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies III: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984; David Hardiman, 'Adivasi Assertion in South Gujarat: The Devi Movement', ibid. Also see their individual works for the elaboration

This strand of historiography has produced invaluable insights into the world of symbols, myths and rumours that constituted a rich repertoire of politics and energized vast sections of people into mass action. However, its outright dismissal of all understandings of popular politics in earlier historiography undermined the wider explanatory powers of their framework.[18] For example, rejecting the value of studying strategic political alignments with 'elite' politics completely has invariably left out entirely the plausible explanations of mass action that could at least complicate straightforward 'initiative from below' approaches to mobilizations.[19] This thesis has gained considerably from the emphasis on symbols and signifiers for mass politics, but combines these insights with efforts at delineating possible structures of strategic alignments and antagonisms, in terms of factions, party-political rivalries, networks of loyalty, and perceptions of interests. Leaving the latter domain out, this thesis argues, would amount to overlooking valuable historical material that can provide nuanced understandings of political processes and act as correctives to romanticisms and orthodoxies of much of older historiographies.

With the exception of Gyanendra Pandey, few Subaltern Studies scholars have really investigated patterns of communal consciousness and mobilization.[20] It seems

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of similar themes: Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; David Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India*, Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1987.

[18] See Guha, 'On Some Aspects'; David Hardiman, 'The Indian 'Faction': A Political Theory Examined' in Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I.*

[19] See, for example, the following collection of essays containing some of the most influential critiques of the Subaltern Studies project: Vinayak Chaturvedi (ed.), *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, London: Verso, 2000. Also, Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850-1950*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 (especially chapter 8).

[20] Much of Pandey's works on the evolution of communalism in North India scattered in various journals and in the Subaltern Studies volumes have been brought together, elaborated and reworked by him in Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*. For his investigations of par-

more useful, in fact, to read Pandey's writings alongside those of other scholars of communalism who have highlighted the role of performative practices and rituals in public arenas for collective action along communal lines, and examined specific motifs and symbols around which communal antagonisms coalesced. Thus, a range of imaginaries, signifiers and symbolic actions – such as conceptions of sacred spaces, cow-slaughter, music before mosques, religious conversions, rape and abduction of women – have been foregrounded as typical sites for the constitution and mobilization of communal identity.[21] This thesis has sought to examine how such images and symbolic practices appear in the historical evidence on communal mobilizations in Calcutta during the last years of the Raj; but it foregrounds other important symbols and slogans that are not seen as part of the usual repertoire of communal politics. In fact, some of these are seen as more congruent with nationalist rhetoric. This thesis shows, for example, how enthusiasm for Hindu-Muslim unity, counter-intuitively, produced a range of street actions that were reflective of Hindu-Muslim animosity. In fact, Hindu communal propaganda often used this rhetoric to portray Muslims as saboteurs of the project of national unity, while Muslim propagandists projected it as a Hindu conspiracy to deprive Muslims of their legitimate political and socio-economic demands.

In examining communal discourses and the actions these precipitated, this thesis argues for the need to interrogate the activities of a wider range of participants beyond

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tition violence, see Gyanendra Pandey, Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

[21] Particularly influential has been the works of Freitag. See Sandria B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989; Sandria B. Freitag, 'Sacred Symbol as Mobilizing Ideology: The North Indian Search for a "Hindu" Community, *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1980. Also see Anand Yang, 'Sacred Symbol and Sacred Space in Rural India: Community Mobilization in the "Anti-cow killing" Riot of 1893', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1980. Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis contains detailed references of works on communal mobilizations and violence.

affiliates of communal bodies or sections within the Congress. It shows that even left-wing organizations and individuals associated with them often played active roles in whipping up or promoting communal frenzy. In a rich account of Hindu nationalist politics in UP (United Provinces, which later became Uttar Pradesh after independence), William Gould has explored how socialist leaders easily navigated between the Congress and Hindu nationalist organizations.[22] He points out that by the 1930s, there was a formal ban on members of the Congress simultaneously holding membership of the Hindu Mahasabha; however, this did not prevent even prominent Congress socialists in various urban centres of UP from maintaining close links with Hindu communal outfits, or championing Hindu revivalist causes. Such contradictory dispositions were not merely about strategically exploiting multiple political affiliations for selfish ends, but were often backed by elaborate intellectual efforts at bringing together socialist radicalism and elements of 'Hindu thought'. This thesis studies somewhat similar cases of involvement of leaders and cadres of various socialist and left-wing outfits in Hindu communal activities. However, in the context of heightened communal tensions in Calcutta by the late 1940s, little intellectual effort seems to have been expended by such socialist radicals to justify their championing of communal causes.

While some of the mobilizing rhetoric discussed in the thesis have long been part of the repertoire of Indian politics, some were specific to the late-colonial and early post-colonial period. This necessitates a discussion of the temporal span this thesis covers and the ways in which this period has been labelled by historians.

[22] William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Dilemmas of 'Naming' the Process of British Withdrawal:

Disagreements abound about how to label the historical process that led to British disengagement from the subcontinent. Some have called it a 'transfer of power'.[23] Others have described it as 'decolonization'. Several scholars insist that it should be understood as 'freedom' or 'independence'.[24] At the risk of over-simplification, 'transfer of power' is the preferred label of those taking a metropolitan perspective. Objections to this description are that it portrays the process of British withdrawal from India as a product of peaceful negotiations by elites at the top. 'Freedom' or 'independence' is the preferred choice of nationalist historiography (with all its internal variations), which insists upon the role of 'India's struggle for independence' in forcing Britain to quit India. The problem with this perspective lies in its romanticization of the 'nationalist struggle' that papers over internal contradictions, splits and disagreements, and marginalizes alternative forms of politics. It is also teleological, as most versions present a linear narrative of growing 'nationalist consciousness' inexorably progressing towards eventual triumph. Both descriptions – 'transfer of power' and 'freedom' (or 'independence') – are, therefore, extreme positions, describing two opposing views about what exactly happened in the subcontinent in the second half of the 1940s.

[23] This debate was precipitated with a multi-volume compilation of primary material relating to developments in the 1940s mainly from the India Office records in London. Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon (eds.), *The Transfer of Power, 1942-47: Constitutional Relations between Britain and India*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, vols. I – XII, 1970-1983.

[24] Another multi-volume compilation of primary material pertaining to developments in India in the late 1930s and 1940s was published from New Delhi under the title: *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India*, New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research and Oxford University Press, 1985-2015. Also see Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, K.N. Panikkar, Sucheta Mahajan, *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi: Penguin, 1988; Mahajan, *Independence and Partition.*

The implications of using the term 'decolonization' remain ambiguous. Despite its currency in recent scholarship,[25] Dipesh Chakrabarty has called for its rejection.[26] According to Chakrabarty, it is bound to produce a 'totalizing model' emphasizing a complete rupture with colonialism. He argues that the journey of societies and nations 'from the colonial to the post-colonial' involves a process in which 'the colonizer and the colonized were often engaged in a hybridizing encounter'.[27] A clinical break with colonialism, which decolonization inevitably implies according to Chakrabarty, is unsustainable given the 'colonizing tendencies' of the post-colonial nation states of South Asia. This became evident, Chakrabarty asserts, right from the moment 'anti-colonial nationalism' mutated into 'official nationalism' in these countries.[28] Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, however, has distinguished between two 'visions' of decolonization – the 'commonwealth vision' and, what one might call, a bottom-up vision.[29] He has rejected the first because it is elitist, statist and marked by a deep metropolitan bias. He has endorsed the second vision of decolonization, which he has used to explore how post-colonial societies creatively imagined their new decolonized existence as citizens of a free nation-state.

This thesis is not particularly interested in this debate about labels, none of which do justice to the complexity of the changes in the subcontinent in this period. It is spe-

[25] Two 'decolonization' readers have been particularly popular among scholars of India in recent times: Prasenjit Duara (ed.), *Decolonization: Perspectives form Then and Now*, New York and London, 2004; James D. Le Sueur (ed.), *The Decolonization Reader*, New York and London: Routledge, 2003.
[26] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Introduction: From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition', in Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Majumdar and Andrew Sartori (eds.), *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007.
[27] Ibid., p. 3.
[28] Ibid., p. 7.
[29] Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Decolonization in South Asia: Meanings of Freedom in Post-Independence West Bengal, 1947-52*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009.

cifically concerned with how, amidst this transition from the colonial to the post-colonial condition, the institutions of the state intervened in social conflicts – during both 'anti-imperialist' agitations and 'communal' violence. It is satisfied, therefore, to characterize the dynamics of government practices during this period as a 'transitional state'. It does not aim to provide a general account of the effects of these transitions on state-society relations, however. The 'transition' that characterized the eclipse of empire and the emergence of the nation-state in India, this thesis argues, had specific implications for practices of state intervention in Indian society.

Chronological Framing of the Thesis:

This thesis attempts to study the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial situation over a relatively narrow time frame of about five years, beginning with the end of the Second World War in 1945 and extending up to early 1950. It recognizes the value of *longue duree* studies in identifying broad patterns and periodic shifts in colonial policy leading up to the British withdrawal. However, this study is preoccupied with delineating deeper nuances in the changing dynamic of state-society relations that the immediate context of imperial withdrawal brought about. An intense focus over a shorter period – covering the eve and the immediate aftermath of the formal-constitutional termination of colonial rule in August 1947 – seems better suited for the purpose.

The end of the Second World War marked a distinct shift in Britain's policy towards India. Before the end of the War, every initiative of the colonial government

was directed towards devising the best possible arrangement for retaining British control over the subcontinent. Ever since the East India Company's 'Indian possessions' were taken over by the British Crown in 1857, constitutional reforms at periodic intervals ensured rearrangements of power relations to suit the changing needs of the colonial administration, enabling it to adjust to growing pressures from the society it governed. Even the Government of India Act of 1937 – the last constitutional reform in British India – was deeply concerned with retaining the ultimate reins of government in British hands. For the colonial administration, the Act only entailed a retreat to a powerful all-India centre, even though it involved substantial devolution of powers to elected political leaders in the provinces. However, everything changed when the Second World War came to an end. The Labour government that assumed power in war-weary Britain was clear about its intention of withdrawing from the subcontinent at the earliest opportunity. Colonial policy, therefore, for the first time, came to be preoccupied with determining the best way of quitting India. This brought about a sea change not only in British attitude towards India's future, but also in the political climate of the subcontinent. The pressing question in Indian politics was no longer about how to drive the British away, ready as the British were to beat a retreat. It now involved debates about India's future once the British rulers were gone, and who should inherit control over the institutions of government the British had created. This decisive shift in the imperial government's attitude towards India and the concomitant change in the directions of Indian politics forms the context with which this thesis begins its study.

The purpose of ending the thesis in 1950 is more tentative. Practical concerns have helped shape this decision. The kinds of archival material that form the backbone of

the thesis – the local intelligence sources of Calcutta Police, for example – dry up by the 1950s both in terms of volume as well as in richness of content. Chronologically, extending the study further would have involved reliance on other kinds of sources. Rewarding as that may have been, difference in the nature of sources would have invariably created problems of comparison with the earlier phases covered in this thesis, compromising its overall narrative and analytical unity. The second reason is that early 1950 witnessed a contrast that makes for an interesting note on which to end the thesis. As independent India adopted the world's longest written constitution, embodying supposedly the best and the most liberal values of the times, it witnessed a fresh wave of Hindu-Muslim violence. Calcutta, again, was one of the main theatres of this anticlimax. Ending the thesis at this point, on a somewhat ironical note, serves to emphasize the difficulty of identifying a precise date when the process of decolonization can be held to have been completed.

The Colonial State in Transition:

Through a close examination of how the local state apparatus intervened in social conflicts, this thesis aims to study how state institutions and practices at the local level responded to the larger processes of imperial withdrawal and nation-state formation. This requires situating the study in the historiography of the nature of the state in colonial and early post-colonial India. Scholarly opinion has always been sharply divided on the issue. Some argue that the colonial state had struck deep roots in Indian soil, changing the nature of Indian society beyond recognition. Others believe that the

colonial state was satisfied with leaving Indian society to its own devices so long as certain imperial demands were met.[30]

Intrusive State:

The argument about the intrusive nature of the colonial state has had a long career, beginning with nationalist scholarship on the nature of colonialism. Nationalists have depicted the colonial state as a highly exploitative machine that drove deep into Indian society to extract as much resources as possible. This ensured steady immiserization of the Indian economy and society, robbing it of all its vitality.[31] The colonial state's ideological apparatus, however, was seen as rather weak. The blatant oppressions and discriminations that supposedly characterized colonial rule is believed to have exposed its anti-Indian character early on, so that the spirit of national resistance emerged spontaneously among Indians from the very beginning, waiting to be tapped by the nationalist leaders. Such a framework enabled nationalist historians to rehabilitate all forms of resistance – rebellions led by local notables, activities of group-specific local associations, peasant movements, and tribal uprisings – within the metanarrative of Indian nationalism's heroic struggle against alien rule, leading the masses to eventual triumph[32].

[30] For a brief but pointed discussion on the historiography of the nature of the colonial state in British India, see Taylor C. Sherman, State Violence and Punishment in India, London; New York: Routledge, 2010, pp. 1-4.
[31] For a classic statement on colonial economic exploitation and its links with the evolution of the Indian nationalist movement in nationalist historiography, see Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India: Economic Policies of Indian National Leadership, 1880-1905*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1966.
[32] Chandra et al, *India's Struggle for Independence*; Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism*.

Other steams of historical writing also argued for a deeply transformative impact of the colonial state apparatus on Indian society. Scholars working within the Subaltern Studies framework argued for an autonomous consciousness of the Indian masses that stood at variance with the elite nationalist leadership.[33] They insisted that the colonial state reached deep into the Indian social fabric by transforming the power relations that operated within colonial society. It was not so much of the bureaucratic apparatus of the colonial state itself reaching all the way down to the local level; it was the social institutions and relations of production that colonialism either created or transformed beyond recognition, which dramatically reshaped Indian lives.[34]

The most far-reaching impact of colonial rule, argued Ranajit Guha, was orchestrated by a radical restructuring of land relations that established the Raj as a 'rule of property' in the subcontinent.[35] Keen to identify and fix ownership of land in the quest for squeezing out maximum possible revenue, the British created a new regime of landed property that not only tolerated older feudal-type exploitation, but reinvigorated them with active support of the state. The recasting of land-ownership as bourgeois 'property' rights superimposed newer structures of oppression onto earlier forms. As older 'local despots' replaced new ones, mahajans and banias entered agrarian land markets, ushering in an altogether new structure of oppression that combined rentier exploitation with usury, ultimately backed up by the authority of the colonial

[33] For a programmatic announcement of the 'Subaltern Studies' agenda, see Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India'.
[34] See Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1999 (first published 1983).
[35] This argument was first developed in Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement*, Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1996 (first published 1963).

state.[36] By the time depredations of the new landed elites became too obvious to ignore, and the colonial state was left with no choice but to take some remedial action, it was unable to do anything substantial. Its local functionaries 'served as instruments of landlord authority' and its legal system was readily available for manipulation 'by court officials and lawyers in favour of landlordism'.[37] Thus emerged the 'Sarkar Sahukar Zamindar' model as the dominant framework in early subaltern studies scholarship for explaining colonial exploitation, the tentacles of which supposedly reached down to the lowest levels of Indian society.[38]

Subsequently, Ranajit Guha developed a more theoretically ambitious framework for understanding the nature of the colonial state.[39] Drawing upon Antonio Gramsci's formulations,[40] Guha argued that all states rule the societies they govern through a range of modalities that encompasses both coercion and persuasion. However, a ruling authority constitutes itself as 'hegemonic' only when its use of persuasion exceeds that of coercion. Colonial rule, Guha insisted, articulated its authority overwhelmingly through coercive means, while its reliance on persuasion remained marginal to its

[36] Guha, Elementary Aspects, pp. 6-8.
[37] Ibid, p. 7
[38] 'Sarkar, Sahukar, Zamindar' exploitation as the typical form of colonial oppression in India were explored through several essays in the early volumes of *Subaltern Studies*. There are, however, few articles that directly address the nature of the state, among which must be counted: Ranajit Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-insurgency', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983; Upendra Baxi, '"The State's Emissary": The Place of Law in Subaltern Studies', in Partha Chatterjee and Gyan Pandey (eds.), *Subaltern Studies VII: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992; Vivek Dhareshwar and R. Srivatsan, '"Rowdy-sheeters": An Essay on Subalternity and Politics', in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (eds.), *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.
[39] Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1997.
[40] Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, (trans. Joseph A Buttigieg), New York: Columbia University press, 2011.

functioning. He went on, therefore, to describe British rule in India as 'dominance without hegemony'. Corollary to this formulation was the assertion that the colonial state was able to dominate Indian society, and hence penetrate deep into the social fabric, largely without bothering to persuade its subject population to give their consent to colonial rule. Nevertheless, Guha's observations on the nature of colonial government was not based on an empirical evaluation of the actual functioning of the state; his object of investigation was the nature of colonial knowledge production and the deployment of a discourse of history that, according to him, unleashed 'spiritual violence' upon the Indian subjects.

The shift towards the study of colonial knowledge production and discourse in the analysis of the colonial state and its functioning began, therefore, under the influence of Guha as well as a genre of historical anthropology pioneered by Bernard Cohn.[41] However, this historiographical move entrenched itself more firmly with the popularization of Michel Foucault's critiques of modern power his ideas about 'governmentality',[42] Henri Lefebvre's spatial analysis[43] and Edward Said's theorization of 'orientalism' as a form of colonialist knowledge.[44] These influences produced a series of studies on colonialism, focusing mainly on the nineteenth century and the early decades of

[41] Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among Historians and Other Essays*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
[42] See Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, with Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
[43] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith), Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.
[44] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985.

the twentieth century, that projected the colonial state as a highly intrusive machine that fundamentally reconfigured Indian society.[45]

Limited State:

Some historians, however, challenged the characterization of the colonial state as a highly invasive form of government and remained skeptical of the ability and willingness of the state to strike deep roots in Indian society and transform it in the process.

Inaugurating what has come to be called the 'New Cambridge School' thesis, Anil Seal argued that imperialism was driven by impulses of power as well as profit.[46] This meant that expenditure incurred in the quest for power could not be allowed to diminish the quantum of profit that the authorities wanted to extract from India. Lowering the cost of administration was, therefore, a key concern for the colonial government, which prompted them to seek out cheap allies in the localities. Such transactions in-

[45] The 'intrusive state' thesis has been worked out in the context of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in a number of highly influential works. For a discussion of the growing intrusive and transformative potential of the prison system in British India, see Satadru Sen, Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000. For developments in the domain of science and medicine, see Gyan Prakash, Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999; David Arnold, Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth Century India, Berkeley: University f California Press, 1993. For a discussion of how the colonial state penetrated Indian society through colonial knowledge production and caste, see Nicholas B. Dirks, Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001. For an account of spatial dominance, see Manu Goswami, Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004. On colonial forestry, see K. Sivaramakrishnan, Modern Forests: Statemaking and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999; for a study of governmentality in a city space, see Stephen Legg, Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi's Urban Governmentalities, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

[46] Anil Seal, 'Imperialism and Nationalism in India', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1973, pp. 321-347. In his conception of imperialism, Seal was drawing upon an earlier thesis: John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'An Imperialism of Free Trade', *The Economic History Review*, New Series, vol. 6, no. 1, 1953, pp. 1-15.

volved a political bargain which assured the authorities of low-cost revenue collection and preservation of order in the localities provided the state allowed its collaborators ample freedom in local affairs. This, Seal contended, amounted to a situation where 'the British were winking at the existence of a legal underworld where the private justice of faction settled conflicts with the blows of lathis, or where, at the best, the strong could get their own way in the courts'.[47] In time, however, increase in demands for revenue from India on the behest of Britain's expanding global ambitions necessitated greater intervention in local autonomy. But these were balanced out by creating new institutions from mid-nineteenth century onwards, and introducing systems of nomination, representation and election in them. In effect, this was an effort at 'casting wider nets to find collaborators',[48] who could be harnessed to Britain's imperial ends. However, to ensure that these new institutions worked within the framework provided by government, colonial rule introduced new categories and classifications; this ensured that even in matters where Indians were given a free hand, they now had to express themselves only through governmental categories in their dealings with the state. Such developments, Seal argued, eventually 'ruptured' the autonomy of regions and localities, but did so in ways that allowed the state to economize on administrative costs by leaving local initiative in the hands of Indian collaborators.[49] What emerges from this description is an image of the colonial state having to grant considerable autonomy to Indian collaborators in the locality to satisfy demands made upon it by the British imperial system. The mechanisms devised to channelize Indian initiative may have varied over time, but, structurally, the colonial state retained these features all through its Indian career.

[47] Seal, 'Imperialism and Nationalism', p. 328.
[48] Ibid, p. 333.
[49] Ibid, p. 329.

This framework was carefully worked out over two edited volumes through a series of essays.[50] Though the central concern of most of these studies was to explicate the dynamics of Indian politics as it traversed the local, provincial and national domains, they worked with, implicitly and explicitly, the notion of the colonial state delineated by Seal. Subsequently, efforts were made to nuance the understanding of the state by drawing attention to temporal shifts, largely postulating a growing intrusiveness of its institutions over time.[51] But studies of specific localities revealed large domains of autonomy that Indian collaborators continued to enjoy well into the twentieth century.[52]

Revaluating the Late-Colonial and Early Post-Colonial State:

Despite all the differences between those who believed in the intrusive nature of the colonial state and those who argued for its limited reach, there seemed to be an apparent agreement. There seemed to be a consensus that, over time, the colonial state had been able to intervene in Indian society to a much greater extent. At least by the last decade of its existence, it was believed, the Raj had been able to reach deeper into Indian social life. This idea was subsequently elaborated mainly by political scientists who began studying the nature of the post-colonial state in India.[53] Despite the initial

[50] Gallagher and Seal (eds.), *Locality Province and Nation*; Baker, Johnson and Seal (eds.), *Power, Profit and Politics.*

[51] See, especially, David Washbrook, 'Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3, 1981.

[52] See, for example, Anand A. Yang, *The Limited Raj: Agrarian Relations in Colonial India, Saran District, 1793-1920*, Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1989.

[53] See, for example, Paul R. Brass, *The Politics of India since Independence,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, London: Penguin Books, 1997; Zoya Hasan (ed.), *Politics and the State in India*, Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000.

turmoil created by partition and the birth-pangs of the new nation, many scholars argued, the Nehruvian state was able to restore the state machinery to health and efficiency within a short time; it was able to generate enough consensus for greater penetration in the socio-economic life of its citizens; large-scale hydro-electric and industrial projects driven by state initiative were seen as testimony to the early post-colonial state's abilities and achievements.[54] Considerable attention was devoted to how this had come about and the class interests that the state machinery came to articulate. An influential strand within Indian Marxism came to characterize the early post-colonial state in terms of a 'coalition' of class forces – comprising the landed magnates, the bourgeois capitalists and the bureaucratic-managerial elites – with no single class being able to dominate the governmental apparatus.[55] This, they postulated, gave the Indian state a degree of autonomy to intervene and restructure Indian society and economy in fundamental ways.

However, there were others who were simultaneously drawing attention to a deepening crisis of governance in India. Soon, political analysts turned towards the theme

[54] For historically grounded studies of these processes, see Ramchandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*, London: Macmillan, 2007. Also, for a nationalist reading of the history of Nehruvian India, see Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee and Aditya Mukherjee, *India after Independence*, New Delhi; London: Viking, 1999.

[55] For one of the earliest exposition of what has come to be called the 'Neo-Marxist' understanding of the Indian polity, see Pranab Bardhan, *The Political Economy of Development in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990. Achin Vanaik, however, emphasized upon the relative political strength of the agrarian bourgeoisie in the dominant coalition. See Achin Vanaik, *The Painful Transition: Bourgeois Democracy in India*, London: Verso, 1990. Ashutosh Varshney and Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Rudolph also insisted on the growing power of rich farmers and agrarian capitalists: Ashutosh Varshney, *Democracy, Development and the Countryside: Urban-Rural Struggles in India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Lloyd I Rudolph and Susanne H Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987. For a rigorous theorization of this framework in terms of the idea of 'passive revolution', see Sudipta Kaviraj, 'A Critique of the Passive Revolution', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 23, no. 45-47, 1989, pp. 2429-2444. For an overview of this debate see Partha Chatterjee, 'Democracy and Economic Transformation in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 43, no. 16, 2008, pp. 53-62.

of 'ungovernability', lamenting not just general lawlessness in public life but also rampant corruption and coercion perpetrated by state functionaries.[56] These became difficult to ignore since at least the 1980s, with a resurgence in secessionist and ethno-religious violence, matched by increasing instances of 'excesses' committed by the coercive arms of government. State personnel seemed to take sides openly in situations of civic strife; they often appeared to be acting as agents of dominant groups.[57]

Searching for roots of the crisis, however, has made scholars revaluate some of the assumptions of the historiography of the colonial state, especially its last phase. An influential strand characterized the growing disregard for formal-legal procedures in dealings between the state and its citizens as a deepening of democracy and, counter-intuitively, the successes of the democratization process in post-colonial India.[58] Others have been less optimistic. A growing scholarship on the 'everyday state' has come to argue that the crisis represents the continuation of practices pioneered by colonial statecraft, which has been rendered unmanageable by its entanglements with democratic procedures. The foremost exponent of the latter thesis is Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, whose essay on 'customs of governance' has been seminal to a range of new

[56] Atul Kohli, Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
[57] This increasingly expanding literature includes, for example, A.R. Desai (ed.), *Expanding Governmental Lawlessness and Organized Struggles: Violation of Democratic Rights of Minorities, Women, Slum Dwellers, Press and Some Other Violations*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1991; Ujjwal Kumar Singh, *Political Prisoners in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998; Siddharth Varadarajan, *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy*, New Delhi; New York: Penguin Books, 2002.
[58] This is at least one reading of Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

studies engaged in rethinking the nature of the late-colonial and early post-colonial state in South Asia.[59]

Unwilling to invest in good governance, argued Chandavarkar, the colonial approach to public order involved a regime of 'salutary neglect'. This meant that the state was interested only in maintaining a façade of peace over a range of social conflicts, which were 'abandoned to the disciplinary mechanisms of local structures of power'.[60] But such power structures seldom proved resilient. Local conflicts frequently erupted with enough vehemence to blow away the illusion of order. Increasing demands on government for the preservation of peace, therefore, led to the creation of a bureaucratic and policing structure; but these often fell far short of the task. Colonial policing therefore chose to concentrate on selected targets while leaving out vast domains of social conflict to be resolved through informal power networks of the neighbourhood. But when the veil of order blew away, the policing apparatus, true to its military antecedents, responded with spectacular violence. This became increasingly apparent with the growing strength of mass mobilizations in the 1920s and 1930s and the deepening self-perception among state functionaries of its own inadequacy and vulnerability. At the same time, however, the ingrained 'habits and customs of governance' produced powerful images of the state standing aloof from and above the sociopolitical realm. The high-handed language of adjudication and concession that state officials deployed produced the illusion of the state's abstraction from society as 'pre-given', while managing competing and conflicting interests from an elevated pedestal.

[59] Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, 'Customs of Governance: Colonialism and Democracy in Twentieth Century India', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2007, pp. 441-470.
[60] Ibid, p. 449.

By the late 1930s, introduction of elections on a wider scale with an expanded franchise pushed local-power dynamics up the tiers of government hierarchy. The result was that local power struggles, so long circumscribed within the locality, permeated the entire state apparatus. Leaders dependent on local support and influence had little interest in ensuring the rule of law when their local dominance was threatened, often using their influence over the coercive machinery to shore up their power. On the other hand, as David Washbrook has pointed out, Indian elected leaders who functioned within the colonial autocratic framework of government, were always seen by the British authorities as representatives of mere factional, particularist or sectional interests. British ruling ideology conceived of good government essentially as rule of an enlightened executive imbued with a 'service ideology'.[61] Therefore, partly to counter the supposedly adverse impact of representative government, and partly propelled by historical contingencies such as the outbreak of the Second World War, the executive arm of the state was strengthened with exceptional and arbitrary powers. This is the machinery that the nation state came to inherit after independence. The new regime of universal franchise it inaugurated created a peculiar imbalance: the idea of popular sovereignty which projected elected governments as 'servants' of the people sat awkwardly alongside the belief in the necessity of extraordinary executive power that is free from popular pressures. Chandavarkar suggested that the crisis of government in the post-colonial era has to be understood historically as the unfolding of this colonial inheritance. While democratic processes pushed local conflicts up to the highest levels of government, reliance on executive action led to an unprecedented elaboration of bureaucratic structures, completely irresponsive to popular mandates.

[61] David Washbrook, 'The Rhetoric of Democracy and Development in Late Colonial India', in Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal (eds.), *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

These insights, stated with sweeping brush-strokes by Chandavarkar, stimulated subsequent research on the nature of state power and its relation to society during the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial period in South Asia.

Arguing that the twentieth-century state in India was 'vulnerable, fluid and replete with tension',[62] Taylor C. Sherman has put forward the notion of the 'coercive network' to understand the state's quotidian functioning. Charting practices of governance from the Jallianwala Bagh incident in 1919 to the 'police action' and counter-insurgency operations in Hyderabad in the 1950s, Sherman has shown how the everyday state constantly adapted to the changing political climate in India. Far from arbitrary sanctions of the state being progressively replaced by rational, streamlined penal practices – involving formal arrests by the police, impartial trials and convictions by the courts and reforms in prisons – the twentieth century state relied heavily on 'penal shortcuts'.[63] 'Informal, extra-judicial, violent and collective punishments',[64] often tangentially linked to the formal criminal justice system, remained the corner-stone of the penal regime; sanctions were often imposed by 'intermediaries, quasi-state actors and private parties'[65] rather than the formal governmental apparatus. Thus, understanding the state's quotidian activities requires going beyond a narrow focus on individual state institutions – police, army, bureaucracy and so on – to study the 'interconnected institutions, laws and practices' that constituted the 'state's coercive repertoire'.[66]

[62] Taylor C. Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India*, London; New York: Routledge, 2010, p. 1.
[63] Ibid., p. 5.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid, p. 1.
[66] Ibid.

In drawing attention to the diversity of penal practices, Sherman has argued that though most of the practices of the everyday state lay at the fringes of the formal regime of criminal justice, these were always a part of larger imperial agendas. The priority accorded to the imposition of order by an under-resourced state machinery often led to official connivance in acts of disproportionate and extra-judicial violence perpetrated by individual state actors on their own initiative; a range of practices also fell within the domain of 'judicially sanctioned violence'.[67] This led to an expanding gap between formal-official commitment to minimal use of force and tacit approval of increasing levels of violence in the everyday practices of the state. This also meant tension between the processes of centralization of authority and policy-making on the one hand and assertion of autonomy by individual state actors tasked with implementation of policy on the other. The state in mid-twentieth century South Asia, argued Sherman, tended to react to emerging circumstances and events much more than to 'proactively shape realities on the ground'.[68]

Some of these arguments have been explored by several authors in an edited volume on the nature of the everyday state in India and Pakistan in the first few decades after independence.[69] Bringing both India and Pakistan within a single analytical frame, these essays have sought to bridge the gap between 'high' and 'low' levels of politics and state action by examining policy formulation at higher levels and their interpretation and implementation at the local level. These authors have argued that the process of post-colonial nation-building did have a profound impact on the every-

[67] Ibid, p. 10.
[68] Ibid, p. 11.
[69] Taylor C. Sherman, William Gould and Sarah Ansari (eds.), *From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. These essays were first published in *Modern Asian Studies* in 2011.

day lives of the new citizens of India and Pakistan; however, the 'rhetorical underpinnings' and the 'modus operandi' of the new nation-states exhibited a surprising lack of novelty and were often built upon colonial practices of governance.[70]

Several authors have drawn attention to the overwhelming reliance on the 'performative aspects of state power' of both the governments of India and Pakistan. Awe-inspiring grand state projects, Marcus Daechsel and Danial Haines have shown, sought not only to change the landscape and the built environment, but also to discipline population, though with little ultimate success.[71] Similarly, Yasmin Khan has shown how state spectacles and rituals that accompanied Gandhi's death were aimed at consolidating the Nehruvian state.[72] Contrary to assumptions about the stability of the Nehruvian state, several authors have drawn attention to weaknesses of the both the early Indian and Pakistani state, especially to meet popular demands.[73] Again, some of the authors have shown how conceptions of Indian citizenship and constitutional provisions guaranteeing fundamental rights deviated from the liberal egalitarian rhetoric of the Constitution. They have shown that 'quotidian conceptions of belonging' frequently acquired greater importance than legal considerations when it came to how the regime of citizenship operated on the ground;[74] even legal provisions of citi-

[70] Ibid, p. 5.
[71] Markus Daechsel, 'Sovereignty, Governmentality and Development in Ayub's Pakistan: The Case of Korangi Township', ibid; Daniel Haines, 'Concrete 'Progress': Irrigation, Development and Modernity in Mid-Twentieth Century Sind', ibid.
[72] Yasmin Khan, 'Performing Peace: Gandhi's Assassination as a Critical Moment in the Consolidation of the Nehruvian State', ibid.
[73] William Gould, 'From Subjects to Citizens? Rationing, Refugees and the Publicity of Corruption over Independence in UP', ibid; Also see Ian Talbot, 'Punjabi Refugees' Rehabilitation and the Indian State: Discourses, Denials and Dissonances', ibid; Sarah Ansari, 'Everyday Expectations of the State during Pakistan's Early Years: Letters to the Editor, ***Dawn*** (Karachi), 1950–1953', ibid.
[74] William Gould, 'From Subjects to Citizens?', ibid; Taylor C. Sherman, 'Migration, Citizenship and Belonging in Hyderabad (Deccan), 1946-1956', ibid.

zen's rights came to be derived from colonial legal provisions that had clear majoritarian and masculine biases.[75] Together these essays went a long way in revising the long-held beliefs on the nature of the everyday interactions between the state and subjects/citizens in the late colonial and early post-colonial periods.

A theme that recurs throughout this new historiography of the everyday state is the extent to which popular perceptions and interpretations of state action had an impact upon the functioning of government. Taylor C. Sherman has shown how criticism of government action and the state's mechanisms of dealing with disorder were engaged in a dialogic relationship throughout the late-colonial and early post-colonial period. Just as strategies of popular protests attempted to circumvent the regime of punishment, governmental practices also underwent transformations to deal with new forms of mass action. Thus Sherman's study has been invested in what she has called a 'cultural history of state violence'.[76]

In studying how state action was understood by the people, historians have turned to the theme of 'corruption'. William Gould, for example, has attempted to open up discussions about how subjects/citizens experienced the state by examining the range of exchanges, relationships and interactions between officials and the public that has come to be defined as 'corruption'.[77] He has argued that both colonialist and nationalist discourses dismissed corruption in India as part of 'customary exchanges' peculiar to traditional societies. These could be overcome, it was believed, through moderniza-

[75] See Eleanor Newbegin, 'Personal Law and Citizenship in India's Transition to Independence', ibid.
[76] Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India*, p. 1.
[77] William Gould, *Bureaucracy, Community and Influence in India: Society and the State, 1930s-1960s*, London; New York: Routledge, 2011.

tion, either by introducing enlightened European practices of government or by the developmental initiatives of the nation-state. However, Gould pointed out, even historians who have studied local structures of social power and influence, and how these constituted wider networks of political alliances and associations, have refrained from reflecting upon contemporary public debates and responses to such processes. He demonstrates how studying what has been labelled as 'corruption' can provide invaluable insights into notions of proper state behaviour and public morality which are crucial to the understanding of the functioning of the everyday state. By examining the notion of 'corruption' historically, in the course of the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial period, he shows how the contours of normative expectations from and conceptions of transgressions by state actors changed over time. While systemic transgressions persisted, specific historical conjunctures increased public sensitivity towards 'corruption'.

An important article has focused upon the post-partition government services in India and Pakistan as critical sites for the understanding of the everyday state.[78] The authors have highlighted the tremendous pressures under which state functionaries had to operate in the years after British withdrawal. These pressures were generated by both the uncertainties and endemic violence precipitated by partition as well as the high public expectations that independence inspired. Most importantly, the article has argued for the necessity of taking into account two sets of relationships in the understanding of the everyday state: between 'citizens and officials' and those between 'government servants, lobbying groups and political interests which often sought to

[78] William Gould, Taylor C. Sherman and Sarah Ansari, 'The Flux of the Matter: Loyalty, Corruption and the 'Everyday State' in the Post-Partition Government Services of India and Pakistan', *Past and Present*, no. 219, 2003, pp. 218-279.

co-opt the services for their own ends'.[79] The latter became particularly important with the transition to independence, as government functionaries, including middle and lower level civil servants and policemen, came to make their own demands upon the state and assert rights that came with citizenship.

This new turn towards everyday practices in the analysis of state-society relations have been inspired by anthropological perspectives on the nature of the state and how it is experienced. A brief discussion of this literature, therefore, is essential to position the present thesis in the existing literature. The following section attempts this, but explicates its significance in the context of some older discussions on state-society relations specifically pertaining to the last years of the Raj.

State-Society Relations and the Transition to Nationhood

One of the first group of historians to doubt the ability of the late colonial state to dominate and transform society were those who had studied the impact of the Second World War on India.[80] However, there were debates about the degree of autonomy the colonial state enjoyed in relation to Indian society.

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[79] Ibid, p. 242.

[80] Indivar Kamtekar, 'The End of the Colonial State in India, 1942-1947', PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1988; Indivar Kamtekar, 'A Different War Dance: State and Class in India, 1939-45', *Past and Present*, vol. 176, 2002, pp. 187-221; Sanjoy Bhattacharya, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India, 1939-45: A Necessary Weapon of War*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001; Sanjoy Bhattacharya, 'An Extremely Troubled Relationship: The British Colonial State and the Communist Party of India, 1942-1944', in Biswamoy Pati (ed.), *Turbulent Times: India, 1940-44*, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 1998. For studies on the Bengal famine, around which there is now a consensus that it was very much the result of the wartime state's policies, see Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981; Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-44*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982;

Indivar Kamtekar has suggested that the end of British rule should be understood in terms of a crisis of state institutions.[81] Until the Second World War, Kamtekar has argued, the colonial state was successfully building new institutions through constitutional negotiations. During the War, however, the state over-stretched its resources. Post-war political upheavals made heavier economic exactions from India difficult and expensive. This, according to Kamtekar, precipitated Britain's withdrawal from the subcontinent. Central to his thesis is an idea of a colonial state autonomous from the society it governed.

Others have proposed a more 'embedded' view of state institutions. In his study of state propaganda during the Second World War, Sanjoy Bhattacharya has shown how local state functionaries often subverted directives from higher officials, and were deeply integrated into the dynamics of local society.[82] Subsequently, the fundamental premises of the 'autonomous state' model came under conceptual criticism.

Kamtekar has explicitly drawn his conceptual framework from Theda Skocpol's idea of the 'autonomous state'.[83] Skocpol accounted for the collapse of the pre-revolutionary states during the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions as outcomes

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Bikramjit De, 'Imperial Governance and Challenges of War', *Studies in History*, vol. 22, 2006, pp. 1-43.

[81] Kamtekar, 'The End of the Colonial State in India, 1942-1947'.

[82] Bhattacharya, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India, 1939-45*; Bhattacharya, 'An Extremely Troubled Relationship'.

[83] Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Also see Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

of flawed policies that these states autonomously pursued.[84] The social composition of the ruling elites, and class contradictions within these societies, played no role in her explanatory framework. Similarly, Kamtekar has explained the collapse of the colonial state in India in terms of the fatal policies it (autonomously) pursued during the War. From this standpoint, the rebellion of government functionaries against the state (as in the Royal Indian Navy mutiny or revolts within the constabulary) represented the 'infiltration'[85] of the state by society. This military metaphor was used to suggest how the entry of socio-political forces into state institutions was an anomaly, profoundly limiting the choices available to the colonial state for manoeuvre. This, Kamtekar suggests, led to its ultimate collapse.

Timothy Mitchell has been the most vocal critic of the 'autonomous state' model.[86] Mitchell argues that those who subscribe to it fail to sustain this binary without adopting an extremely narrow view of policy-making impulses of the state, often having to reduce it to intentions of state-actors, indeed even to the will of monarchs.[87] Rather than conceiving of the boundary between state and society as rigid and externally demarcated, Mitchell proposes that we should see it as one that is drawn from within. He emphasizes the need for careful, historically-grounded, studies of institutional mechanisms and practices through which networks of power maintain a socio-

[84] Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions.*
[85] Kamtekar, 'The End of the Colonial State in India, 1942-1947', pp. 77, 109.
[86] Timothy Mitchell elaborates his critique of the autonomous state model in two essays: Timothy Mitchell, 'State, Society and the State Effect' in Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (eds.), *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, Malden, Mass; Oxford: Blackwell, 2009. Reprinted in G. Steinmetz (ed.), *State/Culture: State Formation after the Cultural Turn*, Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1999. Timothy Mitchell, 'The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics', *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 85, no. 1, March 1991, pp. 77-96.
[87] Mitchell, 'Society, Economy and the State Effect'; Mitchell, 'The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics'.

political order. Drawing upon Michel Foucault, Mitchell argues that the polymorphous forms of modern power that operate through the elaboration of hierarchical institutional arrangements of authority to produce disciplined governmentalized populations, also produce, through the same mechanism, a 'state effect'.[88] The operation of governmental techniques produces the illusion of the modern state as a coherent, larger-than-life, singular entity capable of exercising its autonomous agency, completely abstracted from the socio-political realm.

Anthropological perspectives on the Indian state resonate with some of Mitchell's formulations.[89] Through a rich ethnography of a North Indian village, Akhil Gupta, for example, has shown how the state at the local level is no more than a cluster of fragmentary institutions and mundane practices of local officials. These blur any conception of a coherent state structure standing in opposition to the society it governs.[90] On the other hand, his study has revealed how the state, as a distant trans-local entity, has entered the consciousness of villagers through various government schemes of rural development. The inhabitants of the village also exhibited a grasp over the hier-

[88] Mitchell, 'Society, Economy and the State Effect'.
[89] Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (eds.), *The Anthropology of the State*; Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat (eds.), *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2001; C.J. Fuller and Veronique Benei (eds.), *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, London: Hurst & Co., 2001; and Stuart Corbridge, et. al. (eds.), *Seeing the State: Governance and Governability in India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
[90] Akhil Gupta, 'Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 22, no. 2, May 1995, pp. 375-402. Also reprinted in Sharma and Gupta (eds.), *The Anthropology of the State*; Also see Akhil Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence and Poverty in India*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2012, pp. 75-110.

archical distribution of power within the state apparatus, and were able to call upon the help of higher authorities to remedy their victimization by corrupt local officials.[91]

Mitchell's analysis has one important lacuna, however. He is critical of Michel Foucault for overstating the omnipresence and success of governmental technologies. He argues that Foucault underestimates the role of resistance in destabilizing the disciplinary project of modern institutions of power. But he does not explore what implications this critique might have on his own postulation of the 'state effect'. If disciplinary power is under constant challenge, the 'state effect' it produces must also be perennially unstable. How, then, is the image of the state as a coherent, all-powerful, distant entity sustained? In the Indian context, Thomas Blom Hansen's works offer useful insights.

Thomas Blom Hansen has pointed to a long legacy in British legal theory of imagining the state through a 'deep and constitutive split' between its 'sublime' and 'profane' aspects.[92] This imagination of the state, he has argued, has had its imprint upon post-colonial India as part of its colonial inheritance. The profanity of the state consists of the 'incoherence, brutality, partiality and banality' of everyday governance and 'the rough and tumble of negotiation, compromise and naked self-interest displayed in local politics'.[93] On the other hand, the state's sublime dimension consists

[91] For another insightful anthropological study on state and corruption, see Jonathan Parry, '"The Crisis of Corruption" and "The Idea of India": A Worm's Eye View', in Italo Pardo (ed.), *Morals of Legitimacy: Between Agency and System*, New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000.
[92] Thomas Blom Hansen, 'Governance and Myths of State in Mumbai' in Fuller and Benei (eds.), *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*; Also see Thomas Blom Hansen, *Violence in Urban India: Identity Politics, Mumbai and the Post-Colonial City*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
[93] Hansen, 'Governance and Myths of state in Mumbai', p. 35.

of a conception of an all-powerful, distant entity, far removed from the contaminating proximity of the pettiness of everyday life. The state, in its sublime aspects, embodies rationality and appears as a repository of impartial justice. Thus, when state functionaries participate in, or even orchestrate, social conflicts, this imaginary of the state facilitates its relegation only to its profane dimensions. Its sublime aspects retain their sanctity, and are called upon to deliver justice and resolve conflicts in the socio-political realm. Commissions of inquiry, the 'impartial' judiciary and such other institutions represent this sublime aspect of state power.

Extending Mitchell's formulation, it may be argued, therefore, that the sublime dimension of the state restores the 'state effect' every time its profanity drives it to the point of crisis. This is how even in the most unjust, majoritarian and xenophobic regimes, the state manages to retain a degree of legitimacy as a signifier of a higher good and as an embodiment of a higher notion of justice. Even when state power is in acute crisis, those who operate the state machinery strive to perpetuate the sublime imaginaries of the state; because, in the interest of its own survival, 'the myth of the unity and coherence of the state must be kept alive'.[94]

This thesis proposes that the specificity and, indeed, the profundity of the moment of transition from the colonial to the post-colonial order in South Asia may be understood as a crisis of state power when *both* the sublime and the profane dimensions of the state's imaginary had fallen apart. *This moment is the subject of this thesis*. It was marked by a loss of hope in the capacity of the state to deliver any higher justice.

[94] Ibid., p. 64.

The thesis embarks upon a detailed study of the patterns of street agitations and communal violence in Calcutta that exhibit a sense of deep crisis of state power. However, the depth and complexity of the historical material that this research had to deal with does not allow for a simple reduction of the state's imaginary into a sublime/profane binary. The framework is useful nonetheless, however, in conveying the degree of erosion of public confidence in state institutions.[95] The victims of violence and injustice saw no remedy immanent in the state. They had no one to turn to, no authority who could intervene on behalf of the state and restore faith in its institutions. This also prompted people to question state authority in radical ways. They could directly threaten state officials during 'anti-imperialist' street action; they could kill their communal 'others', confident of their impunity from state sanction. In fact, it was the depth of the sense of complete erosion of state authority that presented direct street action as the only mode of securing justice. The transition to post-colonial nationhood, this thesis argues, thus needs to be understood as a project of a nationalist elite having to rescue the state from an unusual crisis. They had to resurrect, once again, a state imaginary with sublime attributes – rational, benevolent, just, incorruptible and impartial – so as to reclaim their legitimacy to rule. However, building upon the new historiography of the everyday state, this thesis shows how this process lacked coherence or consistency. Despite suffering a great loss of public confidence in the efficacy and neutrality of the state, the institutions of governance survived and came to be strengthened, extended and elaborated by the nation state. However, even this process remained haphazard; some colonial institutions were strengthened, some

[95] Some recent historians of the everyday state argue that criticisms of government, 'made worse by the pressures of the Second World War, meant that confidence appeared to have reached its nadir by 1947…' See Gould, Sherman and Ansari, 'The Flux of the Matter', p. 240.

marginalized, while others acquired new content. Thus, it defies any simple teleological explanation of a progressive strengthening of institutions of governance in post-colonial India matched by a similar process of recovery of public confidence in them.

The thesis argues, however, that the crises that state institutions encountered during this interregnum provided the new rulers with a great opportunity to rearrange the distribution of social power on the ground. It created a moment when it was possible to reorder society in such a way that enabled the new ruling elites to consolidate their authority with greater ease. They frequently took recourse to suppression of all those who challenged their authority, by a combination of both persuasion and muscle-flexing. Sunil Khilnani reminds us that universal suffrage and constitutional democracy were not bestowed upon the people of India through popular demand: 'it was given to them by the political choice of an intellectual elite'.[96] But before these enlightened constitutional provisions were implemented by this nationalist elite, local elites did everything they could to ensure that these enlightened constitutional provisions would not endanger their ability to rule. Segments of society who were seen as stumbling blocks to their dominance were either won over or subjugated. This brutal task was accomplished in the interregnum before constitutional safeguards and democratic procedures obliged them, at least theoretically, to uphold the sanctity of the state's sublime status.

[96] Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1997, p. 34.

Sources and Methodology

The thesis is an empirical study of state power at a moment of crisis. It explores the forms and possibilities of popular politics opened up by this transition to post-colonial nationhood. It uses many sources, including memoirs of leaders, archival documents of political organizations and newspapers; but the focus remains upon a variety of official sources.

The work looks at interactions between different levels within the state apparatus – local, regional, national and imperial – and analyses how these interactions catalysed developments at the local level. Among official sources, it uses sources from archives in London, New Delhi and Calcutta to understand the context within which local developments took shape and how these local issues informed discussions at higher official levels. Yet the most important source base that it brings to the fore – much of it for the first time – is the archive of the Special Branch of the Calcutta Police.

Political intelligence gathered by the city police constituted the lowest level of official intelligence about political goings-on in the city-space. It is a unique source for a variety of reasons. It defies many of the usual characteristics of official sources. First, it lacks the authoritative, 'truth-proclaiming' voice of the state that official sources typically display. It remains perennially fragmented, incoherent and inconsistent. The police often deployed more than one agent to collect information about important political incidents. This often produced multiple, and sometimes even divergent narratives of the same incident. This makes available to the historian a polyphonic perspective on events. Second, higher echelons of the government used these

fragmentary and disjointed records to arrive at the authoritative voice with which they strove to proclaim the 'truth'. This gives historians a unique opportunity to study how this seemingly unquestionable state knowledge is produced - the assumptions it makes, the knowledge that it elides, the gaps to which it turns a blind eye. It also provides the historian access, admittedly limited and incomplete, to the 'official mind'. Which versions of events higher officials choose to accept, what 'facts' they reject and on what grounds, gives the historian a sense of the selectivity of official versions of events. Third, unlike many other official repositories, police intelligence does not completely exclude the voice of non-state actors. They enter the police archives through a variety of means, even if they are heavily mediated. These unofficial voices articulate themselves through intercepted letters, leaflets and pamphlets, newspaper cuttings, confessions during police interrogations and many other ways. But, above all, the police often used non-official networks, including 'informers' within criminal gangs, to gather intelligence on vital issues.[97] This again demonstrates how closely the everyday state and local society remain intertwined.

Of course, police sources have many limitations. The police archive is one whose ultimate preoccupation is with criminality. It therefore has its own biases in terms of the subjects it chooses, the people it talks about, the nature of events and actions that finds space within it. This thesis aims to address these shortcomings in two ways. First, it tries to read police records alongside other kinds of sources – official archives produced at other levels of the government hierarchy, as well as non-official sources.

[97] Francis Tuker, who was posted in Calcutta as the General Officer Commanding of the Eastern Command during the last days of the Raj, wrote in his memoir: 'The majority of the goondas are known to the police and are on the registers of the *Thana*. They also give information to Police *Thana Babus* against opposite goonda gangs, and that indeed is the main system employed by *Thanas* in obtaining information about these gangs.' Sir Francis Tuker, *While Memory Serves*, London: Cassell, 1950, pp. 13-14.

Second, it seeks to read the archive both along and against the grain[98] – to go along with what the narrators want the readers to know, the way they tell the stories, as well as to remain alert to what the narrators do not want the readers to know, their omissions and silences, and what they choose to leave out at the margins.

Outline of the Chapters

The thesis opens with official discussions of the trial of the Indian National Army. Three officers of the INA – a Hindu, a Muslim and a Sikh – were selected for trial at the Red Fort in Delhi. The chapter examines the official rationale for these decisions, which are seen by many as a major *faux pas* of the government (*qua* Kamtekar, a fatal policy pursued by the autonomous state). Next it analyses the agitation against the trial of these officers in the streets of Calcutta. It exposes the myth that this agitation was a model of cross-communal anti-imperialist harmony, which supposedly characterized mass movements in India in the aftermath of the Second World War.

If the agitation against the Red Fort trials deviated from the model of an ideal cross-communal anti-imperialist agitation, the campaign against Rashid Ali's conviction in Calcutta moved even further away from this ideal. The second chapter seeks to question the 'revolutionary' character that some historians have ascribed to this agitation. The chapter shows that the celebration of this agitation is often premised about a

[98] For methodological discussions on reading archives 'along the grain', see Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', *Archival Science*, vol. 2, 2002, pp. 87-109. Also see Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009. For a discussion on reading the archive 'against the grain', see Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India'.

lack of knowledge of the details of the Rashid Ali case itself, as well as a misrepresentation of some details about the agitation that followed. It will show that the alleged 'injustice' in Rashid Ali's conviction became a mere symbol around which an anti-state (and anti-police) sentiment coalesced. More than a 'cross-communal' 'anti-colonial' protest, the street agitation represented deep resentments against the government, especially the police.

The third chapter shows how relations between Hindu and Muslim inhabitants of Calcutta began to fall apart during the last phase of the Second World War. It is interested in the deterioration of everyday interaction and the low-scale pervasive violence in the city in the war's aftermath. It deliberately takes the story beyond the Great Calcutta Killing to show that this catastrophic communal riot was not a sudden development, but an exacerbation of everyday hostilities between communities. Again, these hostilities represented a lack of faith in the government's capacity (or willingness) to arbitrate between contending interests within the social domain.

Chapter four focuses on symbols for the articulation of communal grievances that gained currency in early 1947. Punjabi Muslim policemen, newly recruited into the Calcutta Police by the Muslim League government, became the target of street agitations. Hindu propagandists highlighted this strategy of police recruitment to argue that not only was the everyday state biased and corrupt, but that such biases and corruptions were being encouraged by higher echelons of the government. Therefore, Hindus could not expect justice from any state authority anymore. This campaign mobilized support for the Hindu demand for Bengal's partition, which sounded the death-

knell for alternative vision's of Bengal's (and India's) future, especially the movement for a sovereign and united Bengal.

The final chapter explores how the new Hindu elite who came to control the government of West Bengal after partition reordered community relations in society in significant ways. Despite being a minority within the city's population, pre-partition Bengal was a Muslim-majority province ruled by Muslim political formations through Calcutta. The new rulers of West Bengal overturned these power relations by reducing the city's Muslims to a vulnerable minority. This was accomplished through brutal force, this thesis argues, in the crucial years before constitutional guaranties promised minorities protections and safeguards.

The aim of the thesis, on the whole, is to bring both so-called anti-imperialist agitations and communal violence in the same city-space, and analyze them within a single frame. Through this, it hopes to contribute to the understanding of India's transition to nationhood and the transformations this brought about in the everyday practices of its state apparatus.

Chapter 1

Post-War Dilemmas and the Indian National Army: Agitations in Calcutta against the First Red Fort Trial

Studies of popular politics after the Second World War have understood the protests against the first Indian National Army (INA) trials at the Red Fort as representing the consolidation of widespread anti-colonial resentment. Some historians consider the INA demonstrations in Calcutta in November 1945 as the apogee of this popular mood. Of the three INA officers who were tried at the Red Fort, one was a Muslim, one a Sikh and the third a Hindu. Historians have argued that this made people of all faiths come together to protest against the colonial government.[1] Gautam Chattopadhyay goes on to insist that the protests had the potential to change the very nature of decolonization, had they been taken to their logical conclusion by the national leadership; the 'bourgeois' leaders, however, preferred compromises with imperialism to a radical revolutionary movement which could have endangered their own social dominance.[2]

[1] Sumit Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership, 1945-47', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 17, no. 14/16, Annual Number, April, 1982, pp. 677-689. Also see Sohini Majumdar, 'A Different Calcutta: INA Trials and Hindu-Muslim Solidarity in 1945 and 1946' in Tanika Sarkar and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (eds.), *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades*, New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2015, pp. 235-266.

[2] Gautam Chattopadhyay, 'The Almost Revolution: A Case Study of India in February 1946' in Barun De (ed.), *Essays in Honour of Prof. S.C. Sarkar*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1976. Also see Gautam Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt against the Raj, 1945-46' in Amit Kumar Gupta (ed.), *Myth and Reality: The Struggle for Freedom in India*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1987.

Sumit Sarkar also celebrates the November agitations in Calcutta as 'non-communal' and 'anti-colonial', but recognizes that such agitations had their limits. Protests against the trial of INA officers, he points out, were confined to only a few cities, and the vast majority of India's population living in the countryside remained largely indifferent.[3] Sucheta Mahajan is also critical of these agitations. She agrees that these were emotional outpourings of popular nationalism, but concludes that Congress leaders rightly distanced themselves from such 'militancy' as the agitations were 'premature'. She prefers turning the 'spotlight' to the 'vast, non-heroic, non-militant multitudes' who were equally stirred by anti-colonial feelings, who went to nationalist meetings, subscribed to nationalist funds and rejoiced in nationalist celebrations. [4] Their support shows that far from being 'bourgeois' and 'compromising', the Congress leaders were, in fact, the true champions of popular, cross-communal, anti-colonial sentiments.

Instead of turning the spotlight away, this chapter hopes to intensify the focus on the precise unfolding of the November agitations in Calcutta. In so doing, it challenges the consensus that the agitations represented a 'non-communal' and 'anti-colonial' mood that rose above narrow communal or party-political affiliations.

The chapter begins by refuting the contention that the decision to try INA officers belonging to different religions and to hold the proceedings at the Red Fort was a misjudgement on the part of British India's military establishment. The first two

[3] Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership'.
[4] Sucheta Mahajan, 'British Policy, Nationalist Strategy and Popular National Upsurge, 1945-46' in Amit Kumar Gupta (ed.), *Myth and Reality: The Struggle for Freedom in India, 1945-47*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1987, p. 80. Also see Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*, New Delhi; London: Sage, 2000.

sections demonstrate that rather than being random, capricious and 'autonomous' decisions of state actors, these were products of negotiations between different layers within the colonial government who responded to a variety of pressures in the socio-political realm.

The last two sections delve deep into the details of the protest as it unfolded on the streets of Calcutta in November 1945. It shows that the dominant description of these protests as 'non-communal' and 'anti-colonial' obscures its underlying complexities, which reveal the nature of Calcutta's politics in the post-war period, but also provide critical insights into the nature of mass mobilizations and popular politics.

Post-War Debates, Judicial Processes and the First Red Fort Trial

The trial of INA officers Shah Nawaz Khan, Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon and Prem Kumar Sahgal staged at the Red Fort – an insignia of precolonial Indian glory – backfired upon the colonial government. It allegedly provided the occasion for different communities and political parties to come together to agitate against the colonial state. Many historians assume that this decision was either borne out of imperial arrogance or the government's lack of foresight.[5] They hold the army, especially the Commander-in-Chief, Claude Auchinleck, responsible for the terrible lapse of judgment. Penderel Moon, for example, insists that the details of the trial

[5] See, among others, Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership'; Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt against the Raj'; Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers Against the Raj: A Biography of Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose*, New Delhi: Viking, 1989; Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991.

were decided upon by the army 'against the advice of the Home Member'.[6] But Peter Ward Fay believes that the decisions were 'practical', and that Auchinleck 'did not mean to send a signal'.[7] The Red Fort was 'a known and public place', its walled enclosure made it secure, and its clerical staff could be easily mobilized to provide 'logistical support'.[8] The choice of a Hindu, a Muslim and a Sikh for the trial was also not deliberate. They were brought to trial, Fay argues, 'because they were at hand and eminently triable'.[9] He reiterates, 'There was no guile in the business, no hidden agenda'.[10]

The accounts, while at odds with each other in some respects, both explain government decisions as if these were 'autonomous'. In these narratives, state institutions or actors – 'the army' or the 'Commander-in-Chief' – emerge as free decision-makers, untouched by socio-political pressures. The exact discussions that led to fixing the precise details of the trial remain unavailable. But, through a contextual reading of debates that animated the post-war government, this section suggests that decisions about the first Red Fort trial, were, in fact, products of complex negotiations at different echelons of government. State actors at various levels had their own concerns and responded to pressures of many kinds – international opinion about British colonial policies in India, public opinion within India, opinion of Indian and British political leaders as well as concerns about 'law and order'.

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[6] Penderel Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, London: Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 173.
[7] Peter Ward Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1994, p. 471.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

The INA issue came to the forefront of public debate in the context of a land-slide victory for the Labour Party in the British general election of 1945.[11] In India, this raised hopes of a speedy advance towards India's self-government, although the pronouncements of Labour leaders soon robbed them of their illusions.[12] So as to 'retain the initiative', both London and New Delhi recognized the need for a 'suitable gesture'.[13] However, different echelons of government had different ideas about how Britain should proceed to address India's future. Differences of opinion with London were fuelled, to some extent, by Viceroy Wavell's personal apprehensions about Labour politicians. He feared that Pethick-Lawrence, the new Secretary of State, could have 'fixed and old-fashioned ideas derived mainly from his Congress contacts'.[14]

Soon after assuming office, the new government in Britain invited Wavell to London to discuss issues concerning India's problems.[15] The meetings that followed exposed the deep differences in outlook between the Indian establishment and the India Office.

The priority of the Labour government, as became evident to Wavell during his meetings with the India and Burma Committee, was to relieve itself of the burden of

[11] Telegram from Government of India, Information and Broadcasting Department to Secretary of State, dated 1 August 1945, Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer of Power, 1942-7* (Henceforth *TP*), vol. VI, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1976, no. 1, p. 1.
[12] 'Press Adviser's appreciation for the second half of August 1945', L/PJ/5/152/45, India Office Records (Henceforth, 'IOR').
[13] Telegram from Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, New Delhi, 6 August 1945, *TP*, vol. VI, no. 5, pp. 34-35.
[14] Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, p. 161.
[15] Letter from Pethick-Lawrence to Wavell, dated 18 August 1945, *TP*, vol. VI, no. 38, p. 92.

ruling India. War-ravaged Britain wanted to beat an honourable retreat as quickly as possible, while securing Indian cooperation in strategic sectors such as trade and commonwealth defence.[16] The Labour ministry was keen to demonstrate to their wartime allies, especially the United States, as well as political parties in India and Britain, that they were taking energetic steps in that direction. But, even before a formal 'transfer of power' could be negotiated, London wanted to portray British rule in India as benevolent and just. It wanted immediate replacement of wartime emergency ordinances with peacetime laws, fair trial to all those who had been jailed during the war, a degree of political freedom and a free press. Through these measures, the Labour government in London hoped to convince international opinion and Indian leaders of their genuine desire to promote self-government in India and secure Indian cooperation for commonwealth strategic interests after British withdrawal from the subcontinent. In other words, the Labour government wanted to project its immediate post-war policy priorities in India as guided by 'rule of law' – conditions that facilitated impartial dispensation of justice through legally constituted courts and according to rational peacetime laws. They were motivated, therefore, by the desire to uphold the 'sublime' aspects of the state.[17] They also wanted laws to be interpreted in the most generous terms to generate 'goodwill' among Indians; this, the government in London thought, would encourage Indian leaders to participate in a balanced dialogue on India's future relationship with Britain with open minds.

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[16] See Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964*, London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975; Partha Sarathi Gupta, 'Imperial Strategy and the Transfer of Power, 1939-51' in Amit Kumar Gupta, *Myth and Reality: The Struggle for Freedom in India, 1945-47*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1987.

[17] For a discussion on 'sublime' and 'profane' dimensions of the state, see: Thomas Blom Hansen, 'Governance and Myths of State in Mumbai' in Fuller and Benei (eds.), *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*. Also see Thomas Blom Hansen, *Violence in Urban India: Identity Politics, Mumbai and the Post-Colonial City*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

The priorities of the government of India were different. During the war, it had ruthlessly suppressed dissent, as was evident from the manner in which it crushed the Quit India movement in 1942.[18] Its wartime economic policies unleashed a disaster that claimed lives and livelihoods of millions.[19] It had replaced ordinary laws with draconian executive ordinances – including the infamous Defence of India rules – that enabled the state to throw thousands of political workers behind bars as a preventive measure, even before they attempted subversion.[20] All these factors, the government of India feared, had eroded whatever legitimacy it presumed it had among its Indian subjects. It suspected that widespread dissension was brewing below the surface, which would erupt the moment wartime regulations were relaxed. It therefore preferred a cautious approach. The government of India wanted to regain its

[18] Studies on the Quit India Movement include F.G. Hutchins, *Spontaneous Revolution: The Quit India Movement*, Delhi: Manohar, 1971; Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), *The Indian Nation in 1942*, Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1988; Gyanendra Pandey, 'The Revolt of August 1942 in Eastern UP and Bihar', ibid; David Hardiman, 'The Quit India Movement in Gujarat', ibid; M. Harcourt, 'Kisan Populism and Revolution in Rural India: The 1942 Disturbances in Bihar and East United Provinces' in D.A. Low (ed.), *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1917-47*, London: Heinemann, 1997; Bidyut Chakrabarty, 'Political Mobilization in the Localities: The 1942 Quit India Movement in Midnapur', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1992, pp.791-814; Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Local Politics and Indian Nationalism: Midnapore, 1919-1944*, Delhi: Manohar, 1997; Stephen Henningham, 'Quit India in Bihar and Eastern United Provinces: The Dual Revolt' in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, vol. II, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983.

[19] Wartime economic policies precipitated the Great Bengal Famine in 1943 that, according to reliable estimates, claimed about three million lives. See Amartya K. Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982; Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-44*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982; Bikramjit De, 'British Policy in Bengal, 1939-45', Unpublished D.Phil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2002; Bikramjit De, 'Imperial Governance and the Challenges of War: Management of Food Supplies, Bengal, 1943 - 1944', *Studies in History*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2006, pp.1 – 43; Sugata Bose, 'Starvation Amidst Plenty: The Making of Famine in Bengal, Honan and Tonkin, 1942-1945', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 24 no. 4, October 1990; Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine and the End of Empire*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

[20] Taylor C. Sherman has suggested that the colonial state always used a range of techniques other than proper court trials to punish its colonial subjects. However, such practices became acute during times of emergency, such as during the Second World War. See Taylor C. Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India*, London; New York: Routledge, 2010.

legitimacy by slowly buttressing Indian cooperation at various levels. Accordingly, the Viceroy recommended reconstitution of his Executive Council even before elections were held in India.[21] Following elections to the provincial legislatures, he wanted to appoint a Development Council with elected Indian representatives to advise the central government on post-war reconstruction and development schemes.[22] But given that his priority was to prevent violence at all costs, and 'stiffen the morale' of administrative functionaries, especially the police and the army, Wavell was reluctant to give up wartime emergency powers immediately. His commitment towards release of political ('security') prisoners or giving them a fair trial was tenuous. As opposed to the attitude of the new government in Britain, the main concern of the government of India was to maintain 'law and order'. Establishing 'rule of law', which Indian administrators interpreted merely as 'appeasement' of public opinion, was not Delhi's priority.

Frictions between the India Office in Britain and the government in India were hardly a new feature of late colonialism. Wavell himself had faced considerable challenges dealing with the Churchill government during the war.[23] Yet, the nature of antagonism between the post-war Labour government and the government of India was significantly different. During the War, the British government's policy priorities involved maintaining the status quo in India and mobilizing its resources for the war effort. It was the government of India under Wavell which pressurized London to

[21] 'Agenda, Memoranda and Minutes of the Governors' Conference', 1-2 August 1945, *TP*, vol. VI, no. 2, p. 23.
[22] Ibid., p. 17; Also, Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 6 August 1945, ibid., no. 5, pp. 36-37.
[23] Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal.* Also, R.J. Moore, *Endgames of Empire: Studies of Britain's India Problem,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988; R.J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps and India, 1939-45*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979; Madhusree Mukherjee, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II*, New York: Basic Books, 2010.

initiate dialogue with Indian political leaders to secure their cooperation during the War. After the War, under the Labour regime, the dynamic was reversed. As Wavell put it in his diary after several sessions of discussion with the new India and Burma Committee, 'Compared with last time [during the Churchill regime], I have had to raise my right foot – the one on the accelerator pedal – and put down my left foot – the brake pedal… – gently but firmly.'[24] Wavell thought that the Labour government needed to slow down; they seemed to be too much in a hurry to solve India's complex problems.

Of course, differences between the government of India and the Labour government in Britain about immediate post-war policies were not irreconcilable. It is better understood as a difference of priorities and emphases. Despite advocating a cautious approach, Wavell knew all too well that he had to return to peacetime administrative arrangements soon enough, and ensure press freedom and promote fair trial, however limited in scope this might be. Neither did the British government want a violent flare-up or an administrative breakdown. The way post-war 'India policy' played out, therefore, was the outcome of give-and-take between different policy imperatives, all of which aimed at projecting the 'sublime' dimensions of state-power, albeit at different paces and in different ways. Also, all of these imperatives emanated from concerns about socio-political dynamics – international opinion, the need to secure 'goodwill' of Indian leaders or prevent outbreak of 'disorder'. These compromises and negotiations provide vital clues about how the government of India arrived at the controversial decisions about the first Red Fort trial.

[24] Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, p. 171.

The INA trials, therefore, cannot be understood in isolation. They need to be contextualized in their full entanglement with a range of other issues concerning the sanctity of judicial processes that claimed the attention of India's post-war administration. One such issue was that of punishments for those accused of violent crimes during the Quit India Movement of 1942.

As is well-known, Congress, the largest all-India political party had opposed India's involvement in the Second World War. In 1942, the Congress had launched a Quit India movement to force Britain to grant India immediate independence. This had invited state repression. The government of India imposed a ban on the Congress and other allied organizations, confiscated their property and arrested their leaders and activists.

Among the cases concerning Quit India violence, those linked to incidents at Chimur and Ashti gained considerable publicity.[25] The Chimur case involved two connected incidents: in the first instance, a magistrate and a revenue officer were dragged out of a rest house and were 'battered to death'; in the other, a mob chased down a retreating police party and murdered an Inspector and a Constable. Twenty death sentences were passed in this case, of which five were still standing in court in August 1945.[26] In the Ashti case, an entire police station was 'over-run and burnt'; one Sub-Inspector was killed on spot, while a Head-Constable and two Constables

[25] Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 11 August, *TP*, vol. VI, no. 13, pp. 44-45.
[26] Ibid.

were beaten up and burnt alive. Another Constable was killed and thrown into a pond.[27]

Government of India knew that the decisions on Chimur and Ashti cases would also affect at least three others. In the Fatwa district of Bihar, two pilot officers of the Royal Air Force were dragged out of a train and murdered in the railway station. Seven death sentences were originally passed in this case, out of which four were standing.[28] Similarly, at Kulasekharapatnam, two death sentences were passed in connection with the attack and murder of an Assistant Inspector in a salt factory.[29] Again, there was a case in Jaunpur District in Uttar Pradesh, where three Constables on duty in a village were attacked by a mob; two of them were brutally beaten to death. This case differed from the rest in that the incidents occurred after the Quit India agitations had passed its peak. Thus the trials on the last case, which led to five death sentences, took place under the ordinary criminal procedures, unlike the others, which were tried according to the Special Criminal Courts Ordinance (II of 1942).[30]

Death sentences in all these cases were contested up to the level of Privy Council, after the High Courts, Governors and the Viceroy had rejected the petitions. This had resulted in delay in executing the sentences and the convicts were languishing in jail for about two and a half years.[31]

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

After Labour's victory in the elections in Britain, the India Office received several representations on behalf of the offenders.[32] Pethick-Lawrence took up the issue with the Viceroy. He assured Wavell that he was aware of the dangers of interfering with the criminal justice system. He understood, Pethick-Laurence reiterated, that the convicts had been given a fair trial and all the appeals had been rejected by the highest tribunals; he was also aware of the importance of protecting the police force and ensuring that brutal attacks on them did not go unpunished; it was also extremely necessary, he agreed with Wavell, to discourage 'the belief that persistent use of the law's delays would finally be rewarded by a mitigation of the original sentence'.[33] However, he insisted, there were other facts that also deserved attention. The crimes were actually committed about three years ago and convicts were living under the sentence of death for the past two and a half years. The public perceived this as inordinate delay. At the same time, he thought, there was no evidence of 'premeditation' in any of these incidents and that most of these were '*constructive* murders'[34]. Finally, the demand was for mere commutation of the death sentences and not complete remission of punishments altogether – exactly what the courts had decided to do in case of others who were accused in the same incidents.

But, the Secretary of State mostly emphasized certain political considerations. He explained that both in Britain and in India, there was widespread hope that the inauguration of the Labour regime in Britain 'would coincide with some act of

[32] Pethick-Laurence to Wavell, 7 August 1945, ibid., no. 8, p. 40; Pethick-Lawrence to Wavell, 8 August 1945, *TP*, ibid., no. 9, p. 41.
[33] Pethick Lawrence to Wavell,10 August 1945, ibid., no. 12, p. 43-44.
[34] Ibid., p. 43, emphasis in original. 'Constructive murder' is a murder where the accused is known to have been present, but where it was not proven that the accused dealt the fatal blow to the victim. It is akin to the law on 'joint enterprise' in England and Wales.

clemency'.[35] Concessions, if granted, would be welcomed at a time when the relation between the Government of India and the Congress 'has been relaxed'.[36] Moreover, he insisted that Wavell should also see the advantages in 'securing and retaining popular goodwill and of the undesirability of forfeiting it by turning these persons into martyrs'.[37]

Wavell, for his part, thoroughly disapproved of granting clemency on political grounds. Especially in cases concerning Quit India agitations, Wavell pointed out, the Congress seemed to have rejected the path of non-violence altogether. Even Gandhi was defending violent criminals, one Mahendra Choudhury in particular, whose activities had no apparent connection with Congress politics. When Choudhury was hanged, Gandhi had issued a statement accusing the government of judicial murder. Jenkins, the Viceroy's Private Secretary, described this press statement as 'typical of Gandhi [at] his most tiresome'.[38] however the implication, the Viceroy explained, was significant. Congress, in his opinion, was again on a collision path with the government, and any commutation of judicial sentences on political grounds would be treated as appeasement and hailed as Gandhi's victory. This would only encourage further acts of defiance towards government authority.

He further pointed out that delay in the execution of the death sentences resulted from repeated appeals 'on purely legalistic grounds'[39] and, except the Jaunpur Case,

[35] Ibid., p. 44.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Pethick-Lawrence to Wavell,10 August 1945, ibid., no. 12, p. 43-44.
[38] Sir E. Jenkins to Mr. Turnbull, 13 August 1945, ibid., no. 21, pp. 63-65; Also, see Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 12 August 1945, no. 20, ibid., pp. 60-61.
[39] Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 11 August 1945, ibid., no. 13, p. 45.

consisted of challenging the validity of Special Criminal Courts Ordinance under which they were prosecuted.

However, after a prolonged debate, Wavell reluctantly agreed to commute the death sentences to transportation for life on 'humanitarian grounds'.[40] He followed it up, nevertheless, with a lengthy statement on the adverse consequences that might follow from showing too much clemency to violent offenders.[41] First, he pointed out, this would cause resentment in the fighting services. In the Fatwa Case, for example, the Royal Air Force may be particularly unhappy given how brutally their men were attacked and murdered. More importantly, Wavell explained, this would lead to severe loss of morale among the Civil Services in the Provinces. Disaffection in both the civil and military establishments would have serious repercussions on how situations of 'disorder' would be handled in the future. There would be an increased tendency to 'exact retribution on the spot' if the law and order machinery felt that the authorities were incapable of punishing the most barbaric acts against them; this would make prevention of 'irregular action' on the part of government servants practically impossible.[42]

The debate between Pethick-Lawrence and Wavell around punishment of Quit India 'agitators' shows how differences on policy priorities were negotiated within the colonial state apparatus. Pethick-Lawrence's objective was to project the image of the post-war government as merciful and benevolent. This, he thought, would secure 'goodwill' among Indian politicians and prevent the latter from using petty offenders

[40] Ibid.
[41] Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 11 August 1945, ibid., no. 14, pp. 46-47.
[42] Ibid.

as symbols of state oppression. For Wavell, such populism could demoralize government officials and encourage agitators and law-breakers to exploit government's perceived leniency. The outcome was a compromise: even as Wavell gave in to Pethick-Lawrence's wishes, he insisted that the decision had to be projected as motivated by 'humanitarian' concerns and not perceived as political back-pedalling. Moreover, both were responding to pressures from the socio-political realm. If the Secretary of State was concerned about bringing Indian leaders to the negotiation table, the Viceroy was responding to the alarm that top Congress leaders were causing through public statements on the Quit India cases. Similarly, as will be shown below, decisions concerning the first Red Fort trial were also products of negotiations between different levels of colonial officialdom responding to different pressures emanating from the socio-political domain.

Another issue that critically framed debates about the INA trials was the desirability of continuing with war-time practices of 'detention without trial'. During the war, the government had imprisoned members of political parties who had opposed its war-time policies. Armed with emergency rules sanctioning 'preventive detention', the government had rounded up large numbers of such 'security prisoners' without evidence of their participation in any illegal activity.[43] With the war coming to an end, public pressures mounted on the government to either release these prisoners or bring them to trial.

The government in London, keen on perpetuating its image as 'fair' and 'benevolent', insisted that the government of India should either release political

[43] Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 11 August 1945, ibid., no. 16, pp. 48-49.

prisoners or put them up for trial. Pethick-Lawrence was candid about the Labour government's rationale: 'We are likely in the immediate future to come under strong pressure from Indian public opinion to release persons still under restraint for political reasons'.[44] It was important, from London's perspective, that the initiative for their release came from the government and not appear to be forced upon it 'by public pressure or outcry'.[45]

Wavell, on the other hand, was determined to avoid such trials at all costs.[46] The government had rounded up suspected offenders before they were able to commit any act of violence. This *was* the logic of preventive detention – to detain suspects not because they had committed any crime but because they could potentially do so. Therefore, there was no evidence to prove the guilt of most such 'offenders'. If the government had to renounce its power of making preventive arrests, it had to put up the detainees for trial, in which case, they were sure to be released for the lack of any incriminating evidence. That would cause serious embarrassment to the government, and Wavell knew it.

Wavell also wanted to avoid the other option, that of releasing prisoners without trial. He feared that this would plunge India into chaos, as these prisoners, upon their release, would start agitating against government, probably with support from mainstream political parties. With the government's power of making arrests severely curtailed, the administration would not be able to control the resulting mayhem. Therefore, Wavell wanted to release only those who could safely be classified as

[44] Cabinet: India and Burma Committee, 17 August 1945, ibid., no. 33, p. 78.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 18 August 1945, ibid., no. 36, p. 85.

'non-violent' political prisoners. This led to lengthy debates between Wavell, voicing concerns about the Indian administration, and Pethick-Lawrence, representing many of his colleagues in London. This controversy remained inconclusive. The government of India did not agree to large-scale release of political prisoners. Neither were they successful in restricting the release of prisoners only to 'non-violent' Congressmen, partly because they found it impossible to make a clean separation between violent and non-violent prisoners. The outcome was a compromise. It led to slow but steady streams of releases, which also included many 'violent agitators' – many of whom would certainly go on to participate in the Calcutta agitations in November 1945 against the INA trials. The latter included (much to the Bengal Governor's annoyance), Sarat Chandra Bose, Subhas Bose's elder brother, whom the protesters chose as their leader.[47]

Again, it is telling how the Labour government's decisions were influenced by the possibility of strong public pressures in the future for the release of political prisoners; the government of India's views, on the other hand, were coloured by the need to avoid public embarrassments or collapse of 'law and order'. It demonstrates that, far from being autonomous decision-makers, state actors were always in a dialogic relationship with pressures from the public domain.

Debates concerning Quit India violence as well as detention of political prisoners were closely linked with issues that came to the fore during discussions on INA trials. The Quit India-related cases raised questions about the desirability of interfering with judicial procedures. Debates on the fate of political prisoners raised issues concerning

[47] Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, p. 171.

the necessity, or otherwise, of holding trials in court. Both became relevant when officials at different levels of government discussed the trial of former officers of the INA.

Towards the First Red Fort Trial

On 11 August 1945, the Governor-General of the War Department sent a detailed report to the Secretary of State describing how the government of India intended to deal with rebel soldiers under its custody.[48] The War Department divided them into three categories – Blacks, Greys and Whites. All Whites and Greys were members of the INA. Among those classified as Blacks, some were members of the INA while others were soldiers of the 950 Regiment who had allegedly served the Army of Nazi Germany.[49]

The Whites were those whose loyalties were 'beyond question'.[50] The War Department decided that they would be released forthwith and reinstated in the Indian Army. The Greys were those who had served the 'enemy', had been subjected to Axis propaganda, but were not 'fundamentally and incurably disloyal'.[51] They would be dismissed from the services of the Indian Army, forfeit their pay for the period they

[48] Governor-General (War Department) to Secretary of State, 11 August 1945 (Received 12 August 1945), *TP*, vol. VI, no. 17, pp. 49-52.
[49] 'Treatment of Indian and Burman Renegades and Collaborators with the Enemy: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for India and Burma', Cabinet: India and Burma Committee, 20 October 1945, ibid., no. 154, p. 370.
[50] Governor-General (War Department) to Secretary of State, 11 August 1945 (Received 12 August 1945), ibid., no. 17, p. 49.
[51] Ibid.

had spent as prisoners of war, and would become ineligible for war gratuities. A press communique pointed out:

> The offence of going over to the enemy and fighting against their former comrades is the most serious that a soldier can commit. It is punishable with death by the laws of almost all countries, and those who have committed this offence and been recaptured can claim no rights as belligerents or prisoners of war. The Government of India feels however allowance must be made for the circumstances in which the rank and file found themselves placed after their capture in Malaya and Burma. From that date they were in no position to learn the truth of the progress of the war or to hear any news but false and propagandist Japanese reports. Some of them were misled by this propaganda or gave way to pressure or the desire for better treatment and joined the enemy with no motives beyond an immediate improvement in their living conditions. Those men therefore who seem to have been merely misled – and they are the great majority – will be treated with clemency.[52]

This 'clemency' included release from detention, leave with pay for forty-two days prior to their discharge from the Indian Army and exemption from having to refund allowances paid to their families during the time they spent under Japanese pay.[53]

The fate of the Blacks, however, became a matter of intense disagreement between Indian authorities and the Labour government. By August 1945, the War Department had identified about 7,600 captured INA personnel as Blacks. But evidence against the vast majority of them, about 5,600 in number, were either lacking or insufficient to secure conviction through court martial procedures. Out of the remaining 2000, the War Department wanted to try only 600 INA personnel. The Governor-General of the War Department intended to dismiss the remaining 1,400 from the British Indian Army, against whom incriminating evidence did exist, along with the 5,600 against

[52] Ibid., p. 52.
[53] Ibid., pp. 51-52.

whom sufficient evidence did not exist, and detain all of them as 'security prisoners'.[54]

Punishments in cases of trial of Blacks were either death or transportation for life. It was obligatory for courts to award one of the two. However, the confirming officer, usually the Commander-in-Chief, could commute either of these sentences to a period of imprisonment. Government of India decided that, in the interest of uniformity, death sentences would be confirmed only for the following categories of offenders:

(a) Any person actively instrumental in causing the death of any British or Allied subject, whether in or out of battle.
(b) Any person responsible for brutal treatment of any British or Allied subject.
(c) Any person taking a responsible part in the capture and handing over to the enemy of any British or Allied subject.
(d) The Senior officer, V.C.O. [Viceroy's Commissioned Officer] or I.O.R. [Indian Other Ranks] of any party of over ten in number which deserted to the enemy and joined the I.N.A.
(e) Any person who accepted an appointment as a member of Bose's Government.
(f) Any officer of rank of substantive Major and above in the Indian Army who joined the I.N.A. and took a prominent and active part in furthering opposition to the Allied war effort.
(g) Officers and V.C.O.s who were Fujiwara volunteers.[55]

In total, death sentences were likely to be confirmed in no more than fifty cases. The rest would be reduced to periods of incarceration.[56] The press communique, after dwelling on the 'mercy and generosity'[57] with which the government intended to treat the INA prisoners, concluded:

> It is well to remember that the behaviour of all these men makes more glorious by contrast the courage and endurance of those brave soldiers, the great majority

[54] Ibid., pp. 49-50.
[55] Ibid., p. 50. Fujiwara Volunteers were those units of the British Indian Army who defected to the Axis camp before the surrender of British forces in Singapore.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., p. 51.

of the prisoners of war, who stayed true to their salt and stubbornly resisted the efforts of the enemy to undermine their fidelity.[58]

Pethick-Lawrence, however, was 'much averse' to 'a proposal to detain any persons without trial and for an indeterminate period'.[59] While he appreciated that 600 courts martial were a huge number in itself, his colleagues would not agree, Pethick-Lawrence warned, to permit the detention of 1,400 prisoners without trial, even more so for the 5,600 Blacks about whom 'there is a strong presumption of guilt [not] sufficient on which to bring to trial'.[60] This was not so much because the Labour government was obsessed with fair-play; they feared that this would compromise their international reputation, and breed mistrust among Indian leaders, jeopardizing the chances of a smooth and speedy exit from India.

The Governor-General of the War Department argued that his policy was dictated by logistical constraints.[61] He reminded Pethick-Lawrence that the Indian Army was understaffed by about five thousand officers. The numbers would only go down further with the end of the war, as many British officers would now want to retire or be repatriated. Among those who would be available, officers with legal training (who could act as prosecutors and judges) were even fewer. Every military court required at least five officers. If trials were to be completed within a year's time, two hundred and fifty officers had to sit on courts martial as a whole-time commitment. Again, completing the trials of two thousand cases within a reasonable time-frame of twelve months would mean that the Commander-in-Chief would have to consider, in person,

[58] Ibid., p. 52.
[59] Secretary of State to Governor-General (War Department), 17 August, ibid., no. 32, p. 75.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Governor-General (War Department) to Secretary of State, 21 August 1945, ibid., no. 48, pp. 109-110.

about forty cases each week for confirmation. As a result of these difficulties, trials would have to be limited to the minimum number possible.[62] But above all, socio-political imperatives limited his choices. He had to be fair to those Prisoners of War (PoWs) who had 'resisted enemy attempts to subvert their loyalty'.[63] On the other hand, he had to take into account the public support for the INA and Subhas Chandra Bose – head of the government-in-exile of Free India of which the INA was the military arm. Thus, the War Department had to 'steer a middle ground'. This entailed putting only a small number of INA officers on trial, whose trial would certainly lead to convictions.

It would also be impossible to release those INA personnel who would not be tried, argued War Department officials. The Governor-General explained that this was not only because of military concerns; civilian governments were adamant at ensuring that INA Blacks were not let loose on the countryside, where they could fuel civil disorder. They were 'indeed apprehensive about "Greys"'. The Bengal Governor, in particular, thought that '[t]errorists were eagerly awaiting the return of these determined persons trained in the use of arms, and methods of violence'.[64]

The response of Pethick-Lawrence to the War Department reveals London's priorities. 'I regret', wrote Pethick-Lawrence, 'I cannot agree to the indefinite detention under Ordinance without any prospect of a trial of the men in question'.[65]

[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., p. 110.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Secretary of State to Governor-General, (War Department), 23 August 1945, ibid., no. 60, p. 143.

He was prepared, however, to agree to detain the accused in '*military* custody'[66] while their cases were investigated for making a fair trial possible. His objection, then, was merely about how the practice of detention without trial of rebel soldiers was presented by the government to the public. It demonstrates London's obsession with 'appearances'. The fact of detention without trial did not trouble them too greatly so long as it could be *portrayed* as consistent with the idea of 'rule of law'.

It is in this context, of intense and somewhat polarized intergovernmental debates surrounding the INA trials, that the Commander-in-Chief worked out the details of the first Red Fort trial. Although the exact process of settling the nitty-gritty of the trial remain obscure, the tenor of arguments and negotiations between the Labour government in Britain, the Indian military establishment and the civilian administration in India, leaves no ground for doubt that the decisions around the Red Fort trail was a compromise. The Indian military and civilian government stuck to their ground of putting up only a few INA officers for courts martial. They did not agree to any large-scale release of those who would not be tried. But, as part of the bargain, they had to agree to the Labour government's demand that the limited number of trials that would take place should demonstrate the government's commitment to impartiality and justice. Red Fort was the preferred choice precisely because it would draw public attention. The trial, as a performance of justice, would show that the government had no intention of brushing the INA issue under the carpet, or to dispose of the cases in secrecy. The choice of a Muslim, a Sikh and a Hindu officer for the first trial also had similar motivations. It was aimed at avoiding charges of divide-and-rule. The government wanted to appear impartial and above

[66] Ibid. Emphasis in original.

community differences, and prove that they were not trying to victimize one community and appease another.

The first Red Fort trial was neither an arbitrary nor an autonomous decision by Auchinleck. Neither was it, as Fay believes, a casual decision based only upon practicality. The details of the trial were settled upon, of course, to 'send a signal'. This signal was not that of imperial high-handedness or thoughtlessness. It was meant to make a show of government's commitment to fair-play, and shore up the imaginaries of the state as the repository of impartial justice. Of course, it failed, but its failure must not be interpreted teleologically.

The Beginning of the November Agitations in Calcutta

While colonial officials debated whether INA personnel were to be detained under civilian or martial law, the Congress and the 'nationalist' press demanded that INA officers had to be judged in the light of international law. According to its provisions, they argued, Bose and the INA personnel were 'entitled to all the honours of war and are not liable to punishment'.[67] Congress was keen on championing the INA cause, at least in part because elections loomed during the winter of 1945-46. The Red Fort trial was scheduled to start on 5 November 1945. On 15 October, Bhulabhai Desai and Asaf Ali, important Congressmen and celebrated lawyers, informed Wavell that the three accused – Shah Nawaz Khan, Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon and Prem Kumar Sahgal – had entrusted their legal defence to the INA Defence Committee set up by

[67] Sir J. Colville to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, 3 September 1945, ibid., no. 85, p. 197.

the Congress.[68] It was a high-profile Defence Committee. Apart from Desai and Ali, it included luminaries like Jawaharlal Nehru, K.N. Katju as well as Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru. Sapru's inclusion was particularly irksome to officialdom as he was a liberal, and had opposed the Congress in the past. In the letter to Wavell, Desai and Ali asserted that the INA was the 'well-organized, well-trained and well-disciplined' army of the 'provisional Government of Free India', which had a 'definite international status'.[69] Their members were inspired by 'selfless patriotism' and a 'great desire' for 'the achievement of the Independence of India'.[70] This was the line the Congress INA Defence Committee took in a celebrated legal battle at the Red Fort that has become a nationalist legend.

A.G. Noorani has examined the trial in detail.[71] Maybritt Jill Alpes has also shown how, by championing the INA cause in the courtroom and outside, the Congress appropriated the INA within its version of nationalism.[72] However, the protests that the INA trial precipitated in different parts of India have not been probed in detail. This is not because the agitations are of no interest to historians. In fact, in studies of 'popular protests', the agitations against the Red Fort trial, especially those in Calcutta, have found a prominent place.[73] But all of this literature has assumed that the protests were guided by a 'non-communal', 'anti-imperialist' spirit. Criticisms of

[68] Desai and Asaf Ali to Wavell, 15 October 1945, ibid., no. 143, pp. 341-344.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] A.G. Noorani, *Indian Political Trials, 1775-1947*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.
[72] Maybritt Jill Alpes, 'The Congress and the INA Trials, 1945-50: A Contest over the Perception of 'Nationalist' Politics', *Studies in History*, vol. 23, no. 135, 2007, pp. 135-158.
[73] Chattopadhyay, 'An Almost Revolution'; Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt'; Sarkar 'Popular Movements and National Leadership'; Majumdar, 'A Different Calcutta'; Mahajan, 'British Policy, Nationalist Strategy and Popular Upsurge'; Mahajan, *The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*.

these street actions have been restricted to pointing out their limited geographical reach: their location in a few cities. This section revisits the protests in Calcutta and offers a new analysis.

Forebodings of the storm appeared early in the morning of 21 November 1945. A police agent reported a 'morning procession' at 6:15 a.m., when he spotted about thirty individuals meandering through the streets of north Calcutta.[74] They carried large framed photographs of Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru. As the day progressed, several students' processions emerged from different educational institutions and poured into Wellington Square - a large open space in the heart of the city, just south of College Street, the hub of student life in Calcutta. The Special Branch of the Calcutta Police, whose agents made copious records of the events, estimated the total number of protesters at the Square to be around one thousand. About fifty women were among them.[75]

Three organizations dominated student politics in Calcutta at the time: the Bengal Provincial Students Federation (BPSF) led by the Communist Party of India (CPI); a rival group also calling itself the Bengal Provincial Students Federation, referred to as BPSF (New) and led by the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) and the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP); and, finally there was the Congress-led Bengal Provincial Students Congress (BPSC).[76] The Congress had taken up the legal defence of the INA men; unsurprisingly therefore, the BPSC was initially at the forefront of the Calcutta

[74] 'Students, 22.11.45 (Observance of I.N.A. Day on 21.11.45)', K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), Special Branch Records, Calcutta Police (Hereafter, SBR, CP).
[75] Ibid.
[76] See Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt Against the Raj', pp. 153-154.

agitation, and its president, Dilip Kumar Biswas, presided over the Wellington Square meeting. The CPI-led BPSF had supported the call for a students' general strike, 'but there was no formal joint action'.[77]

This meeting continued till about 3:15 p.m. Speakers refuted the charge that the INA was a Japanese-sponsored force and insisted that Indians should learn discipline and communal camaraderie from its 'own army'.[78] The protesters unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the suspension of the INA trials. Finally, Dilip Biswas, the President, announced that a students' procession would march to Dalhousie Square to demonstrate outside the Writers' Building, the headquarters of the Bengal government.[79] A large procession of students came out of Wellington Square and headed towards Dalhousie Square. Almost immediately, the police stopped it at Dharamtalla Street, long before it could reach its destination. Angry students protested by squatting on the main thoroughfare, dislocating the heavy traffic in the area.

It was at this stage that the police began to show signs of panic. Special Branch (SB) sources estimated the strength of protesters at one and a half to about two thousand. The police were hugely outnumbered. A few of them were in plain clothes, and they mixed with the crowd to gather intelligence. One such 'watcher' shadowed a few students, who rang up student leaders of other colleges to join them. A few hours later, this new procession of students arrived. The police party, frightened of being

[77] Ibid., p. 154.
[78] 'Students, 22.11.45 (Observance of I.N.A. Day on 21.11.45)', K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.
[79] Ibid.

surrounded on all sides by protesters, attempted to push back the new students' procession. This angered the protesters even further. Thus began a veritable commotion. A *lathi*-charge by an understaffed police party was met with a rain of brickbats back at them. Both parties suffered injuries.[80]

For hours, Dharamtalla Street, a major urban thoroughfare became a battlefield. The police force became scattered and communication broke down between its members. Protesters chased a section of a police batallion standing at the portico of a cinema hall. The scared policemen took shelter in its lobby. Inspector Hammond, the senior officer commanding this section of the force, tried in vain to disperse the crowd with a *lathi*-charge, but this only infuriated the protestors further, and brickbat-throwing became more intense. Someone set fire to a police lorry standing just outside the cinema. Now the policemen began to fire bullets at the crowd. This resulted in the very first casualty reported in police sources. A student, Rameswar Banerjee, died having been struck by police bullets. The situation then got out of hand very quickly. The protesters, after a brief retreat, began to reassemble and push through the police cordon once again.[81]

Finally, after considerable damage had been done, a party of senior police officers - consisting of the Commissioner of Police, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Headquarters) and Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) - arrived to survey the scene. But this hardly helped to bring the situation under control.[82]

[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

In the meanwhile, another intelligence agent shadowed two students who called up Sarat Bose and asked him to lead the students. He refused. Then they called up Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the Hindu Mahasabha leader, but he was not at home. Next they rang Kiran Sankar Roy, another top leader of the Bengal Congress. He agreed to come and speak to the protesters. Eventually, Kiran Sankar Roy, along with two other Congress leaders – Atul Kumar and Indu Beed – arrived at Dharamtalla Street. They carried a message from Sarat Bose. The police sources report the message as follows:

> Students! You have broken my heart by your indiscipline. I appeal to you two dozen times to disperse peacefully and I sent Kiran Sankar Roy, Atul Kumar and Indu Beed to appeal to you. They appeal to you in the name of the Congress, but you have failed. They appealed to you in my name, but you have refused. You have allowed yourself to be influenced and guided by agents-provocateur and not by reason. You have by your action broken my heart. Still I appeal to you for the last time in the name of the Congress to disperse peacefully. May you have the good sense and wisdom to accept the address you have been rejecting since 5 p.m.[83]

The protesters paid no attention to Sarat Bose; in fact, his message seemed to incense them. One student tore up the paper that contained his message.[84] The rest refused to disperse. At about 10 p.m., by the time the Governor arrived at the scene, many leaders had tried to pacify the students, urging them to disperse. Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the charismatic Hindu Mahasabha leader, also spoke to the protesters.[85] Women leaders took a very prominent part. Bimal Pratibha Devi, a socialist trade-union leader with Forward Bloc leanings, but who, by the mid-1940s was becoming ideologically closer to the Congress Socialist Party[86], played a vital role in leading the students' protests. She was allegedly beaten up by the police.

[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] An undated Special Branch report entitled 'The responsibility for the disturbances in Calcutta from 21.11.45 to 23.11.45' in K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945).

Jyotirmoyee Ganguly, a leader of the women's movement who had been close to Subhas Bose in the 1930s, was also present in solidarity with the students. The very next morning she was killed in a tragic road accident.[87]

Students continued to occupy Dharamtalla Street all night, although their numbers fell to about two hundred. The police reported only the death of one student, Rameswar Banerjee, in police firing, but it seems that there were other casualties too.[88] Gautam Chattopadhyay mentions Kadam Rasul, a young factory worker, who was also killed by bullet wounds.[89]

The next morning, Nagarmal Sharma, a Marwari businessman of Burrabazar and a prominent Congress worker, fed the assembled students. At 6:30 a.m., Bimal Pratibha Devi addressed them and implored them 'to move as a disciplined army and to spread revolution among the people'. She reminded them that their mission was not merely to march to Dalhousie Square; their objective was to 'attain the freedom of their motherland'.[90] Upon Bimal Pratibha Devi's advice, according to police sources, the students divided themselves into groups and dispersed through the city streets urging the public to observe a general strike.[91]

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[87] See Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt against the Raj, 1945-46', pp.155-6. It is important to note that Chattopadhyay specifically mentions that Kiran Sankar Roy did not come to the demonstration at Dharamtalla Street-Madan Street crossing on 21 November (see p. 155). And, he does not mention the presence of Syama Prasad Mookerjee. Both of them, however, were reported to be present by Special Branch sources.

[88] 'Students, 22.11.45 (Observance of I.N.A. Day on 21.11.45)', K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.

[89] Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt Against the Raj'.

[90] 'Students, 22.11.45 (Observance of I.N.A. Day on 21.11.45)', K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.

[91] Ibid.

The protests on the first day, 21 November 1945, demonstrated considerable unity among students. They challenged the legitimacy of judicial procedures under the aegis of the colonial state through street action. They also rejected attempts at top-down control by the established political leadership. Even the BPSC – the students' wing of the Congress, as well as the Forward Bloc, the party created by Subhas Bose, defied Sarat Bose's authority. Yet the apparent unity conceals the restricted support-base of the protests. Large sections of the political spectrum of the province remained aloof from the first day's street action. Communist students continued to sit on the fence, until P.C. Joshi, the General Secretary of the CPI, sent a wire on 22 November, urging the BPSF to 'be with the people'.[92] Again, beyond the rather passive presence of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the Hindu Mahasabha did not actively participate. Most importantly, students affiliated with the Muslim League largely kept away from the agitation.[93] In a Muslim-majority province with an increasingly assertive Muslim population and an influential Muslim League political leadership, this was a major weakness of the movement. Protesters celebrated the non-communal spirit of the INA, but the street action of 21 November did not break the communal divide.

The Changing Complexion of the November Agitations

Whatever unity there was on the first day of the demonstration soon began to crumble. Dissensions and rivalries between political outfits and their factions came to

[92] Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt Against the Raj'.
[93] The Muslim League had actively discouraged Muslim students from participating in the November agitations. Calcutta-based Muslim League leaders had assured the government that they had no sympathy for the INA. See police report entitled 'The Muslim League – I.N.A.', dated 24 November 1947, K.P.M. No. 01683/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP. This issue has been elaborated later in this chapter.

the forefront, to such a degree that it was impossible to sustain the image of these protests as united struggles against colonialism any more.

On the first night of the demonstration, 21 November, at an emergency meeting at the BPSF (New) office in Mirzapur street, student representatives of BPSC, BPSF (New) as well as other smaller groups such as the Chatra Samsad, the Medical Students' Union and the Marwari Students' Union attempted to form a joint council of action.[94] The younger members of the RSPI, Forward Bloc and other parties were 'very agitated', a Special Branch agent observed, who were 'in favour of creating chaos and disorder similar to the August 1942 Disturbances'.[95] But Samarendra Basu apparently withdrew the BPSC from any such 'adventurism'.[96] The meeting broke up in disagreement.

The CPI, as has been pointed out before, stayed largely aloof from the 21 November agitations. But on 22 November, once the BPSF received directives in favour of joining the movement from its party leadership, communist students plunged into action, using CPI's foothold among labour unions to orchestrate a workers' strike.[97] However, an SB agent described speeches of communist student leaders at a CPI-organized meeting the same evening as rather tame. It is significant that despite the usual readiness of the colonial state to blame any 'disruption' as communist-inspired, an SB report had to confess: '…there is no evidence in the SB or

[94] 'The responsibility for the disturbances in Calcutta from 21.11.45 to 23.11.45', undated, in K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt against the Raj, 1945-46'; Chattopadhyay, 'The Almost Revolution'.

Intelligence Bureau (IB) to show that they engaged in acts of violence as a party although individual members might have done so.'[98] It also expressed grave doubts about the sincerity of Communist participation and wondered whether this was a mere tactical manoeuver to retain mass popularity.[99]

The second day's protest was, nonetheless, impressive. All shops were shut, all educational institutions went on strike, transport came to a standstill, and workers downed tools in many factories in the industrial suburbs of Calcutta. Buses, trams, taxis and even rickshaws were invisible on the city's streets. Massive student processions came out. Police reports mention that the largest procession, which marched from College Street, consisted of about ten thousand students.[100] Large numbers of workers affiliated with communist trade unions also joined. The Special Branch reported strong anti-British feeling. A *swadeshi* mood also seemed palpable. Protesters forced the public to discard their hats, ties and coats – as alleged symbols of western cultural domination. They made them throw away their cigarettes and forced them to smoke *bidis* instead.[101]

Different processions eventually converged at Wellington Square early that afternoon. It was a huge gathering – a Special Branch report produced on the day put the figure at thirty thousand.[102] Another report, compiled about two weeks later,

[98] 'The responsibility for the disturbances in Calcutta from 21.11.45 to 23.11.45', undated, K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.
[99] Ibid.
[100] 'Supplement to Special Branch Daily Notes', dated 26 November 1945, K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.
[101] Ibid. A *bidi* is an indigenous, hand-rolled cigarette, often produced by household-based workshops.
[102] Ibid.

reported of a crowd of twenty thousand.[103] Protesters carried Congress and Communist flags, along with Muslim League standards, for the first time during the protest.[104] To all outward appearances, the moment of cross-communal unity seemed to have arrived at last. It soon descended into anticlimax, however, as the unity proved to be a chimera. The meeting dissolved in a complete fiasco; the audience booed RSPI speakers. BPSC and Forward Bloc members accused the RSPI of taking over and dominating the proceedings. They stalled the meeting and urged their supporters to march to Dalhousie Square instead.[105] Protesters dispersed, and members of different organizations marched out in different directions.

While the meeting was breaking up in disarray, Sarat Bose at last made a public appearance. He had finally managed to gather a coterie of student supporters and marched along Wellington Street at the head of a procession of about five thousand students and entered the Square.[106] He attempted to give a speech, but nobody bothered to listen; his voice was rendered inaudible 'in the midst of tremendous confusion.'[107] The Special Branch reporter observed, 'As far as could be gathered, he was requesting the students to obey the orders of trusted leaders and to stop being violent.'[108] At that moment, news arrived of further police firings on student protesters in Dharamtalla Street. There was a stampede for the gates of the Square, and within a few minutes it was empty. Sarat Bose, deprived of an audience, walked

[103] 'Calcutta Disturbances in November, 1945', dated 7 December 1945, K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] 'Supplement to Special Branch Daily Notes', dated 26 November 1945, K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.

to his car and the police reporter lost sight of him in the midst of the departing crowd.[109]

Police firing on the second day resulted in heavy casualties. Every political party seemed taken aback at the level of violence. Leaders realized that they were fast losing control over their followers. They made a second attempt to set up a joint 'Council of Action', this time with the express purpose of stopping 'further acts of hooliganism'[110] and 'rowdyism'.[111] The need for asserting control over 'mobs' had thus gained precedence over protests against the colonial government.

This was not a betrayal by the Congress 'bourgeois' leadership alone. Every political party was anxious to quell 'leaderless' mass action. In fact, that was the only plank upon which leaders of all parties really tried to come together; but even on this cause, fractious Bengal politics proved incapable of reaching agreement. Both the BPSF (New) and BPSC were represented in the council. 'It is vague what actually took place', reported one SB agent.[112] But, by the following day, BPSC withdrew its support from the Council. 'In effect', the SB report concluded, 'the council of action had hardly been established before it disintegrated, having achieved nothing.'[113]

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[109] Ibid.
[110] 'The responsibility for the disturbances in Calcutta from 21.11.45 to 23.11.45', undated, K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.
[111] 'Calcutta Disturbances in November, 1945', dated 7 December 1945, K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.
[112] 'The responsibility for the disturbances in Calcutta from 21.11.45 to 23.11.45', undated, K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.
[113] 'The responsibility for the disturbances in Calcutta from 21.11.45 to 23.11.45', undated, K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.

By that time, however, almost all political groupings wanted the agitation to come to an end. On 23 November, the RSPI formed six 'peace squads' and urged people to remain peaceful. In the meanwhile, the Congress High Command had denounced the movement in no uncertain terms; the Bengal Congress followed suit.[114] But the general strike continued unabated. That afternoon, the Congress leaders also sent out groups of Congress activists to ensure peace, with the active support of the CPI.[115] Vans fitted with loudspeakers and taxis flying both Congress and Communist flags were visible all over the city, pacifying protesters who still thronged the streets; everywhere they urged labourers to go back to work. A Special Branch officer observed:

> The communist *volte-face* from the previous day, and also from the same morning, was very noticeable. Previously party members had been urging workers to go on strike and demonstrate… and now they were aligning themselves with the Congress and asking the public to be quiet and to return to work.[116]

On the afternoon of 23 November, the government called out the army.[117] Protesters had attacked military trucks since the first day of the uprising. But the Bengal government had not authorized the army to use force against protesters. Now it gave them a free hand, and there was hardly a protest from the political establishment. Congress leaders like Dr. Nalinakshya Sanyal, who was soon to be purged from the provincial Congress as part of a drive by the High Command to

[114] Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt against the Raj, 1945-46'; Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership, 1945-47'.
[115] 'Supplement to the Special Branch Daily Notes', dated 26 November 1945, K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.
[116] Ibid.
[117] 'Calcutta Disturbances in November, 1945', dated 7 December 1945, K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.

cleanse it of 'dissidents',[118] were happy to allow the law and order machinery to take over the city streets.[119] In a conversation with the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of SB at Bhawanipore Police Station on 23 November in the evening, Dr. Sanyal reportedly said, '…he and other leaders were not heeded by the hooligans and [they] ran the risk of being assaulted.'[120] He wanted Congress leaders to make a last ditch attempt to go into troubled areas to pacify the public, but '[t]hereafter, if they fail, they [Congress] will be quite prepared for the police or other authorities to maintain order.'[121] He went on in this vein saying that '…police parties should refrain from becoming aroused by minor irritations and should avoid irritating the crowd with minor actions.'[122] The DC appreciated Dr. Sanyal's concerns but was firm in pointing out, '…the one "irritation" police parties were not prepared to put up with was being bombarded with brickbats.'[123]

The CPI organized two small meetings on the same day. One was in South Calcutta at Hazra Park, the other was at Manashatala Bayam Samiti in North Calcutta.[124] In both meetings communist leaders urged the public to remain peaceful. The BPSF (New) held the last well-attended public meeting at Sraddhananda Park.

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[118] See Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 128. For an account of the 'cleansing drive' undertaken by the Congress High Command to 'purify' the Bengal Provincial Congress of dissidents, see pp. 124-149.

[119] S.B. note on conversation between D.C., S.B. and Dr. Nalinakshya Sanyal, dated 23 November 1945, K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP. Also see 'Calcutta Disturbances in November, 1945', dated 7 December 45, K.P.M. No. 01687/05 S.B., File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.

[120] S.B. note on conversation between D.C., S.B. and Dr. Nalinakshya Sanyal, dated 23 November 1945, K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Ibid.

[124] 'Calcutta Disturbances in November, 1945', dated 7 December 1945, K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.

According to police estimates, about ten thousand people assembled at the venue. But, by then, signs of fatigue were unmistakable.[125] There was some mismanagement and there was no microphone for the speakers to use. By the time one was found, the crowd had reportedly dwindled to a fraction of its initial size. But participation was wider and more inclusive; Khaksars,[126] Fazlul Huq's group[127] as well as some students from Islamia College were present. Many prominent leaders addressed the gathering, including Amiya Nath Bose, Sarat Bose's son, who had, by this stage, become something like a private secretary to his father.[128] He explained how 'valuable strength would be dissipated in fruitless action' unless discipline was maintained till the 'right moment' arrived.[129]

Matters came to a head, however, when Badrul Hyder Chaudhuri of RSPI, who was presiding over the meeting, rose to speak. In a rather tactless remark, he suggested that Sarat Bose was 'responsible for the loss of numerous students' precious lives' which could have been averted if he had come to the first day's protest at Dharamtalla Street.[130] He went on to describe Sarat Bose's actions as unstatesmanlike, arguing that '…such men would have to be eliminated from leading

[125] Ibid.
[126] Khaksars were members of a Muslim organization which opposed the Muslim League during this period. For details, see Hira Lal Seth, *The Khaksar Movement and its leader*, Delhi: Discover Publishing House, 1985; Amalendu De, *History of the Khaksar Movement in India, 1931-1947*, Kolkata: Parul Prakashani, 2009.
[127] Fazlul Haq, who was the Premier of Bengal from 1937 to 1943 and had joined the Muslim League before, was now attempting to distance himself from the League and strike an alliance with the Congress in the elections. See 'Secret Report on the Political Situation in Bengal for the first half of August, 1945', 'Secret Report on the Political Situation in Bengal for the second half of August, 1945' and 'Secret Report on the Political Situation in Bengal for the first half of September, 1945' in IOR/L/PJ/5/152/1945.
[128] See Leonard A. Gordan, *Brothers Against the Raj: A Biography of Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose*, New Delhi: Viking, 1989, p. 555.
[129] Ibid.
[130] 'Supplement to Special Branch Daily Notes', dated 26 November 1945, K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.

positions'. [131] Utter chaos erupted that instant. Bose loyalists disrupted the proceedings, declaring that the meeting had been 'captured' by the RSPI. In the pandemonium that ensued, Chaudhuri had to be sneaked out of the meeting to the BPSF (New) office at 18 Mirzapore Street.[132] The trouble did not end there. Shortly thereafter, batches of Forward Bloc students attacked the BPSF (New) office at Mirzapore Street.[133] The road outside it was filled with angry students who attempted to break into the building. Fearing a riot, BPSF (New) leaders addressed the crowd with loudspeakers from the balcony, pacifying them by singing praises of the Bose brothers and eulogizing their contribution to the students' movement in Bengal. In due course, the situation calmed down and the crowd dispersed.[134]

This was not just a manifestation of party-political rivalries. In order to unravel the full import of the event described above, one has to delve deeper into the murky waters of Bengal politics and its constantly shifting configurations. It has generally been argued that political and communal unity was better forged at the barricades than in legislative bodies.[135] However, close historical examination of agitational politics reveals the impossibility of any neat separation between the two domains. Unity of purpose did create a façade of concord when observed from a distance. However, any tiny ripple could easily blow away the entire fabric of political consensus, exposing – not quite the emperor's new clothes - but the delicate balance of factional adjustments that had to be assembled in order to produce the illusion of unity. Influential leaders

[131] Ibid.
[132] 'Calcutta Disturbances in November, 1945', dated 7 December 1945, K.P.M. No. 01687/05 S.B., File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] This is the essence of a remark by Aruna Asaf Ali that Sumit Sarkar quotes with approval. See Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership', p.130.

invested in legislative and party-oriented factional politics each had their coterie of supporters in street agitations; and these supporters, even in moments of street action, often reproduced the factional alignments of high politics at the barricades.

Sarat Bose, a successful Calcutta lawyer, had actively participated in Congress politics since the 1930s along with his brother Subhas Chandra Bose.[136] The Bose brothers emerged as a powerful faction within the Bengal Congress. Initially their rival was J.M. Sengupta. But, after his death in 1933, the Bose faction operated in opposition to a rival faction led by Bidhan Chandra Roy, a prominent Calcutta physician. Around this time, to buttress the influence of their faction, the Bose brothers had begun patronizing a group of young revolutionaries, who provided a backbone of support in intra-party rivalries.[137]

The largest revolutionary societies in Bengal were Jugantar and the Anushilan Samiti. In the post-Swadeshi phase, these revolutionaries had adopted militant terrorist modes of political self-expression, and had caused considerable consternation in British bureaucratic circles, with the result that most of their cadres were rounded up at the first signs of unrest in the wake of Gandhian mass uprisings in the 1920s and early 1930s.[138] During the mid 1930s, precisely at the point when the Bengal Congress was undergoing radical factional readjustments, the revolutionaries began to

[136] For details on Sarat Bose, see *Gordon, Brothers Against the Raj*.
[137] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, pp. 44-54. Also see Leonard A. Gordon, *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement, 1876-1940*, New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1974; Tanika Sarkar, *Bengal, 1928-1934: The Politics of Protest*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987; Rajat Kanta Ray, *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflict of Interests in Calcutta City Politics, 1875-1939*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1979.
[138] For the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, see Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973.

return to active politics, many after long periods in jail.[139] The Jugantar cadres mostly joined the Congress and formed the base of support for the Bose brothers within the party. The Anushilan Samiti's members took a somewhat different political trajectory.

The late twenties and the early thirties of the twentieth century was also a watershed in the history of the Indian left-wing movements.[140] This was the time when the colonial state was devising elaborate judicial procedures to criminalize leftist, especially communist, ideas and staged a number of high-profile court trials in a series of 'conspiracy cases'. While serving their long jail sentences as political prisoners, members of the Anushilan Samiti often found themselves in the company of Marxist leaders and political activists. Tanika Sarkar points out that Anushilan activists were relatively more open minded and receptive to newer ideas than their Jugantar counterparts.[141] Marxist ideas attracted many of them. So, once the Anushilan members came out of prisons, many of them joined the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), the left wing lobby within the official Congress that had adopted Marxism as their official ideology in 1936.[142] However, they were careful to maintain their separate identity even within CSP. The Anushilan group had actively supported Subhas Bose's candidacy for Presidentship of the Congress Party at the Tripuri Congress in 1938 – that fateful All India Congress session that led to Subhas Bose's expulsion from the Congress. However, CSP's vacillation under Jayaprakash

[139] See Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*.
[140] For a discussion on the communist movement in India in the late 1920s and early 1930s, see Shashi Joshi and Bhagwan Josh, *Struggle for Hegemony in India, 1920-1934*, vol. I, New Delhi: Sage, 1992. Also, see *Documents of the Communist Movement in India*, vol. I-III, Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1997.
[141] Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, p. 36.
[142] Murari Mohan Saha, *Documents of the Revolutionary Socialist Party, Volume One: 1938-1947*, Agartala: Lokayate Chetana Bikash Society, 2001, pp. 13-53.

Narayan's leadership, and its ultimate 'betrayal' of Bose for the sake of 'Congress unity', fuelled resentment amongst Anushilan's members.[143]

Subhas Bose formed the Forward Bloc after the Tripuri debacle, as a vehicle to consolidate left wing support under his leadership. The Anushilan group, despite their growing discontent against the CSP, was skeptical about joining it, although they did take part in the Left Consolidation Committee under Bose's initiative.[144] The latter initiative fell to pieces very soon, as the Second World War transformed the context of Indian politics altogether. Anushilan members, still loosely affiliated with CSP, decided to strike out on their own. In March 1940, they launched their own Revolutionary Socialist Party by joining hands with some activists of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army of the legendary Punjab revolutionary, Bhagat Singh.[145] Unlike the CPI and the Royists, RSP took the line that the best way of fighting fascism and defending the Soviet Union was to overthrow colonial rule in a civil war.[146] This was not very different from Subhas Bose's position, and the RSP continued supporting the initiatives of the Bose brothers from outside the Congress. Yet the very same RSP clashed with Bose's supporters in the evening of 23 November 1945.

It is noteworthy that the nature of affinity between the Bose brothers and the RSP activists was more in the nature of personal loyalty than ideological attraction. The latter were at pains to retain their separate identity from both the Bose faction within

[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.

the official Congress as well as the Forward Bloc. Thus, the public fight between RSP and Bose's supporters was not a tussle between two rival political outfits with distinct political positions. It was more of fratricidal hostility, an inter-familial struggle within the same political formation that brought the fragility of the alliances forged in the 1930s under the spotlight.

In any case, after the public fiasco at Sraddhananda Park and Mirzapore Street, the November movement largely fizzled out. The situation returned more or less to normal the next morning. Transport services ran as usual and labourers went back to work.[147] The only political activity on 24 November involved the funeral processions of young men, some of them in their early teens – school children – who had died of gunshot wounds.[148] There was a political gathering of sorts at Muhammad Ali Park, where Abdus Salam's body was brought in. Salam was a Khaksar activist and had been killed by police bullets. Important political personalities attended, including heavy-weight Congress leaders like Kiran Sankar Roy, Aurobindo Bose, the Jugantar Congressite Surendra Mohan Ghosh, Dr. Nalinakshya Sanyal and Bimal Pratibha Devi. Kiran Sankar Roy congratulated the students on their 'success' while condemning 'hooliganism by mischief-mongers'.[149]

Of course, Adbus Salam's 'martyrdom' had to be made much of by those who were keen not to waste the symbolic value generated by the November protests. Now that the movement had come to an end, it was important to salvage whatever could be of any value for buttressing the credentials of political parties and leaders as

[147] K.P.M. No. 01687/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.

'vanguards of anti-colonial resistance'. One way of achieving this was to actively promote the appearance of unity in what was essentially a heterogeneous movement. Uncomfortable incidents of violence and defiance of the organized leadership had to be relegated to the domain of 'hooliganism' carried out by 'mischief-mongers', while the struggle of the 'true' students and workers had to be celebrated as a groundswell of popular anti-colonialism of a homogeneous and united 'citizenry' of a subjugated nation.[150]

The major problem in this endeavour was the persistence of a palpable communal divide. In a Muslim-majority province, the lack of active participation of Muslim political formations, especially the Muslim League, was a major stumbling block.[151] In this context, Abdus Salam's death had immense symbolic value; leaders, especially of the Congress, were keen to harness the symbol in order to sustain the illusion of a cross-communal alliance that supposedly 'characterized' the INA agitation in November 1945.

A brief account of Muslim League's position vis-à-vis the November agitations is in order. On the second day of protest on 22 November, Muslim League students, especially those from Islamia College, had attended the mass rallies organized by BPSC and BPSF (New). But they were immediately ordered by some of the League leaders not to get involved any further. In a confidential statement, Muhammad

[150] The police agent present at Muhammad Ali Park recorded: 'Addressing the gathering, Kiran Sankar Ray congratulated the students of their success in taking their procession through Dalhousie Square and condemned hooliganism by mischief-mongers', ibid. For reactions of the Congress High Command to the November agitations, see Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership', p. 682.

[151] See, police report entitled 'The Muslim League – I.N.A.', dated 24 November 1947, K.P.M. No. 01683/05, S.B. File No. 868D, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.

Usman, Secretary of the Calcutta Muslim League, assured the Bengal government that the Muslim League had absolutely no sympathy for the INA cause because had Bose's army 'succeeded in occupying India they would have ignored the Muslim League and its demands for Pakistan.'[152] He confessed that the Muslim League passed resolutions expressing sympathy with the INA men merely to avoid criticism from rival political parties across the country.[153] Of course, the Muslim League was as faction-ridden as any other political party in Bengal. But whatever fragmentary evidence is available suggests that at least a significant section of Muslim League leaders was at best lukewarm in their support for the November agitations in Calcutta. In fact, many Muslim League followers were actively hostile to the INA personnel on trial, especially Shah Nawaz Khan.[154] Despite being a Muslim, he had publicly expressed his support for the Congress. At a time when Indian Muslims, including those in Bengal, were attempting to articulate a distinct national identity in opposition to the Hindus, a 'nationalist' Muslim with country-wide popular support was hardly welcome to those who had deep faith in the League cause.

It seems, therefore, that hailing the Calcutta agitations in November 1945 as the epitome of a spontaneous 'cross-communal, anti-colonial' mass sentiment is a post facto construction. It possibly started as a nationalist folklore, and then found its way

[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] The hostility towards Shah Nawaz Khan among a section of Muslims of Calcutta was revealed rather dramatically on 25 January 1946 when he went to say his jumma prayers at the Nakhoda Mosque in Calcutta. He had to be quickly driven off to safety when angry Muslims began throwing shoes at him. For details of the incident, see the report entitled 'I.N.A.: Hostile Demonstration against Shah Nawaz', undated but written sometime in early January 1947, K.P.M. No. 01689/05, S.B. File No. 868, P.M. (1946), SBR CP. Even the top leadership of the Muslim League was hostile to Shah Nawaz. The party put up its own candidate against Shah Nawaz when the Congress proposed fielding him for elections to the Punjab Legislative Assembly in December 1945. See Peter Ward Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945*, New Delhi: Rupa, 1994, p. 501.

into historiography. The last two sections have made an attempt to open up such received wisdom to historical scrutiny.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed at refuting two assumptions about the INA agitations in Calcutta in November 1945 that remain pervasive in the historiography of popular politics in post-war India. The first assumption is that the colonial government had arbitrarily and autonomously decided to hold a joint trial of a Muslim, a Sikh and a Hindu at the Red Fort. The second assumption is that the potent symbols invoked in the staging of the trial stirred people of all faiths to come together and launch a united struggle against the colonial government.

The chapter has suggested that in order to understand how the first Red Fort trial came to be staged in the way it did, a contextual reading of sources becomes necessary. The specific decisions on the trial becomes intelligible only when these are studied alongside debates on other issues that claimed the attention of the post-war administration in India and the newly elected Labour government in Britain. It shows, first, that bureaucratic decisions, especially of such magnitude, cannot be seen as 'autonomous decision-making' on the part of state-actors. This chapter has demonstrated how, every argument, every detail of the decisions arrived at through discussions between different echelons of government responded to pressures in the public domain.

The public protests that erupted in Calcutta against the trial of the INA officers at the Red Fort, this chapter has also suggested, cannot be easily reconciled to any simple narrative of çross-communal anti-colonial protests. A careful examination of the way the protests unfolded, the nature of leadership and participation in these agitations, and the divisions that emerged among the ranks of the protesters, bear testimony to complexities that existing historiography has consistently overlooked, deliberately or otherwise.

Chapter 2

Aftermath of the First Red Fort Trial: The Rashid Ali Agitations in Calcutta

In the historiography of popular politics on the eve of India's independence, the street agitation in Calcutta in February 1946 against the conviction of Indian National Army officer Captain Rashid Ali is held as the high watermark of cross-communal anti-colonialism.[1] Gautam Chattopadhyay describes it as the 'Almost Revolution'.[2] Under suitable leadership, Chattopadhyay holds, this could have saved the people of the subcontinent from the tragedy of partition.

This chapter argues for a reassessment of the agitation. It takes a closer look at the trial of Rashid Ali to reveal how the trial was used as a symbol in the popular protests that erupted in Calcutta. It suggests that the agitations only *strategically* invoked the trial, ignoring its more controversial dimensions, and represented it as an exemplar of state oppression. These agitations, this chapter will further argue, must be understood as the unfolding of a progressive crisis of the late colonial state apparatus, brought

[1] Sumit Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership, 1945-47', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 17, no. 14/16, Annual Number, April, 1982, pp. 677-689; Sohini Majumdar, 'A Different Calcutta: INA Trials and Hindu-Muslim Solidarity in 1945 and 1946' in Tanika Sarkar and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (eds.), *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades*, New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2015, pp. 235-266.

[2] Gautam Chattopadhyay, 'An Almost Revolution: A Case Study of India in February 1946', in Barun De (ed.), *Essays in Honour of Prof. S.C. Sarkar*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1976. Also see Gautam Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt against the Raj, 1945-46' in Amit Kumar Gupta (ed.), *Myth and Reality: The Struggle for Freedom in India, 1945-46*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1987.

about by relentless criticism of its justice system, public denunciations of its coercive practices and defiance of its order-enforcing machinery during street actions.

The chapter opens with a reassessment of the government's policy towards the INA, and the changing disposition of political parties on the INA question, after the Calcutta agitations in November 1945. Just as the Government became reluctant to push for further INA trials, Congress leaders also attempted to distance themselves from the street militancy that the trials had precipitated. Yet, they were also reluctant to cede the glory that came with championing the INA cause, and all too aware that Congress' competitors were eager to appropriate the INA issue for their own benefit. Congress' success in setting free the INA officers after the first Red Fort trial raised the value of the INA to all political parties. Rashid Ali's turn towards the Muslim League provided the latter with a golden opportunity.

The second section examines how the League championed Rashid Ali's trial. It will show how the arguments voiced in favour of Rashid Ali were very different from the line the defence took during the first Red Fort trial. It will show how, given the tenor of arguments in court, Rashid Ali's case cannot be fitted into the pattern of anti-communal anti-colonialism.

The discomfiting details of the court proceedings in the Rashid Ali case, the next two sections show, barely found mention during the street agitations in Calcutta in February 1946. Rashid Ali was invoked merely as a symbol to voice a deeper resentment against the colonial state.

Changing Attitudes towards the Indian National Army after the Calcutta Agitations in 1945

Protests in Calcutta against the trial of Shah Nawaz Khan, Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon and Prem Kumar Sahgal in November 1945 forced colonial officials to rethink their policy of holding more INA trials. Even before the Calcutta protests, Auchinleck, the Commander-in-Chief, had expressed doubts about how far the rank and file of the Indian Army were hostile towards the INA 'traitors'.[3] Intelligence reports revealed that returning prisoners of war were not doing enough to proselytize against the INA in their native villages and towns.[4] After the November agitations in Calcutta, Auchinleck held a meeting with senior military officers, Home Department officials and provincial representatives, to discuss government's INA policy.[5] Despite opposition from several senior officials, Auchinleck decided to limit future INA trials only to cases that involved acts of brutality or murder. He was now convinced that '…there was a growing feeling of sympathy for the INA' in the army.[6] He responded to his critics by asserting that no 'senior British officer today knows what is the real feeling among the Indian ranks regarding the INA'. Except for those convicted on grounds of brutality and murder, Auchinleck's preference was to release guilty officers if the tri-

[3] Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 2 November 1945, Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer of Power, 1942-7,* (Henceforth *TP*), vol. VI, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1976, no. 185, pp. 433-6.
[4] Home Department to the Secretary, Political Department, Government of India, India Office, 20 November 1945. See enclosed report from the Intelligence Bureau, Home Department. Ibid., no. 222, pp. 512-5.
[5] Auchinleck to Wavell, 24 November 1945, ibid., no. 233, pp. 530-1.
[6] Auchinleck to Wavell, 26 November 1945, ibid., no. 241, p. 544.

als proved that they had acted in 'good faith'.[7] If they were held in prison, he feared, new governments after the elections in the spring of 1946 would release them and even attempt to reinstate them in the British Indian Army. The Governor of the North West Frontier Province (an important base for army recruitment) went even further than Auchinleck. He argued that the Commander-in-Chief, 'on his own volition and his own responsibility', should immediately announce the withdrawal of all future trials against the INA. Although this course of action was 'repugnant' to him, he believed that this was the only solution. The trials, he thought, were increasingly becoming an 'Indian versus British' issue and '[t]he only way of stopping the rot is by a clean cut… and at once'.[8]

Two factors prompted this rethinking. First was the idea that no British army officer really understood what Indian soldiers felt about the INA; it was possible that many were sympathetic to the INA cause. Auchinleck referred to the 'sepoy mutiny' of 1857 to strengthen this argument. He was not alone: Governor Twynam of the Central Provinces and Berar spoke directly about how troops might respond if ordered to fire on mobs (including violent protests against the INA trials). He went so far as to compare the present state of affairs with 'the days of the mutiny'.[9] He had actually taken the trouble to revisit old files from 1857 and found it 'extraordinary how Units which were thought to be perfectly loyal suddenly decided to throw in their lot with the mutineers'.[10] This confirmed his fears, though he was careful to insist that he did

[7] Auchinleck to Wavell, 24 November 1945, ibid., no. 233, pp. 530-1.
[8] Sir G. Cunningham to Wavell, 27 November 1945, ibid., no. 243, p. 546.
[9] Twynam to Wavell, 26 November 1945, *TP*, vol. VI, no. 239, p. 542.
[10] Ibid., pp. 542-3.

not mean to suggest 'any widespread disposition on these lines'.[11] It was the twitching of an old wound that had never quite healed. The second factor was worry about the way Indian politicians were using, and would continue to use, the INA issue for their 'selfish' interests.

The November agitations in Calcutta had also made Indian politicians rethink their stance. Emerging after a period of incarceration, disarray and inactivity, the Congress championed the INA cause just as the leaders had begun their electoral campaigns in earnest. The Congress had taken the lead in defending the INA officers in court, and had made the trials a major election issue. Yet, once the November agitations broke out in Calcutta, Congress leaders wondered whether they had gone too far in whipping up mass frenzy around the INA cause. The Congress High Command soon began singing a different tune. At an election rally in Bombay on 24 November, only a day after Calcutta had calmed down, Sardar Patel condemned the 'frittering away' of energies in 'trifling quarrels' with the police.[12] From 7 to 11 December 1945, when the Congress Working Committee met in Calcutta to draw up its manifesto for provincial elections, it reaffirmed its commitment to the doctrine of non-violence. Patel clarified Congress's attitude towards the INA in a public speech, which proclaimed that while the INA soldiers deserved to be celebrated for their courage, self-sacrifice and communal unity, members of the INA who wished to join the Congress had to abide by the Congress creed of non-violence and 'put their swords back into their scabbard'.[13]

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[11] Ibid., p. 543.
[12] *Indian Annual Register*, July-December 1945. Quoted in Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership', p. 682.
[13] *Hindu*, 10 December 1945. Quoted in Peter Ward Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945*, New Delhi: Rupa, 1994, p. 503.

In Bengal, the BPCC's attitude towards the INA remained somewhat different. Subhas Bose had by then attained a heroic status in Bengal and the INA enjoyed huge popular support in the province. Sarat Bose basked in the reflected glory of his brother Subhas's achievements. If Congress were to strengthen its shaky foothold in Bengal during the elections, the High Command had to forget the past and invite Sarat Bose, a long-time Congress rebel, back into the fold.

Early in January 1946, after the tortuous and historic Red Fort Trials, Shah Nawaz, Sahgal and Dhillon were found guilty on a number of charges. But Auchinleck remitted the sentence of transportation for life and released all three men. Changes in the attitude of the Congress High Command towards INA agitations notwithstanding, this was a moment of glory for the party and its INA Defence Committee. It was duly celebrated with huge fanfare in Delhi. So, when Shah Nawaz came to Calcutta in the latter half of January 1946, his popularity was at its peak; on his arrival, Major Shah Nawaz Reception Committees sprang up in various districts of Bengal;[14] he was, at this stage, receiving invitations from all parts of India to visit.[15] Unsurprisingly, Sarat Bose was determined to make most of this to recover his reputation, damaged by his refusal to lead the INA protests in November. He celebrated 'INA weeks' and his brother's birthday with pomp; and the Working Committee meeting in Calcutta in December 1945 gave him the opportunity to invite All-India Congress luminaries to some of these celebrations. The resolutions and public utterances of some of these leaders, as we have seen, might have dampened the INA spirit somewhat, but Sarat

[14] See, for example, letter from Mr. Fazal Karim, Kharagpur to the Secretary, INA Relief Committee, Calcutta, dated 30 January 1946, K.P.M. No. 01690/05; S.B. File No. 868 II, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[15] See, for example, letter from the Councillor, Corporation of Madras to Sarat Bose, Calcutta, dated 6 February 1946, ibid.

Bose counter-balanced this by persuading Shah Nawaz himself to visit Calcutta and participate in some of these events.

Although Congress leaders attempted to lower the temperature of mass agitations, they could ill-afford to let go of the INA's glory. If they did, opponents of the Congress could use this powerful political symbol to their benefit. The All India Hindu Mahasabha (AIHM), for example, was desperate to appropriate the INA and Subhas Bose's legacy for all that it was worth. The Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, for its part, instructed its supporters to celebrate Subhas Bose's birthday on 23 January 'in a fitting manner in cooperation with all sections of people irrespective of party affiliation'.[16] This was, the circular explained, a directive from the All-India organization, which was also organizing Bose's birthday celebrations at an all-India level. Senior leaders instructed party workers to emphasize how 'the life work of Netaji Subhas Chandra as represented through the INA movement is the national corollary of the policy of militarization pursued by the Mahasabha during the War'.[17] Party propagandists were asked to explain that Netaji stood for India's integrity, just as the Mahasabha had always opposed vivisection of the country, against the designs of the Muslim League.[18] Support also seemed to be forthcoming from INA officers themselves. Correspondence between Mahasabha leaders intercepted by the Calcutta Police reveal, for example, that Major General Bhonsle, the Chief of Staff of the INA,

[16] Circular from Hindu Mahasabha, issued by Debendra Nath Mukherjee, General Secretary, Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, K.P.M. No. 01689/05; S.B. File No. 868, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

had expressed his inclination to join the Mahasabha rather than the Congress.[19] Bhonsle knew that the Congress would not let him contest elections on its ticket unless he agreed to sign the non-violence pledge; the Mahasabha, on the other hand, was more than happy to 'honour him' with an election ticket.[20]

The Hindu Mahasabha was not the Congress's only opponent. The Forward Bloc was also determined to claim the achievements of the INA. As long as the fate of the INA officers on trial remained uncertain, the Forward Bloc's leaders had maintained a low profile. But now that the INA officers had become national heroes after their release, they resented the Congress for monopolizing all the kudos. The Bloc was Subhas Bose's party established after he was expelled from the Congress; so Bloc members felt entitled to the INA legacy. At a Working Committee meeting in Calcutta in January 1946, a Forward Bloc leader asserted that the Congress was 'exploiting' Shah Nawaz, Sahghal and Dhillon, 'for its own electioneering purposes';[21] no sooner than the 'Fascist dictators' of the Congress feel that 'they had outlived their utility' than 'the same heroes of today will become the condemned individuals [of] tomorrow'.[22] The proof was that the Congress had given election tickets to few members of the Forward Bloc, despite the fact that during the Quit India Movement in 1942 it was their leaders 'who were shedding their blood in the prisons while Patels, Nehrus and

[19] See 'Hindu Affairs: 25.1.46 – All India Hindu Mahasabha', ibid. The report is a summary of a letter dated 21 January 1946 from Ashutosh Lahiri to B. S. Munjee, intercepted on 23 January 1946.
[20] See 'Hindu Affairs: 1.2.46, Hindu Mahasabha – INA', K.P.M. No. 01690/05, S.B. File No. 868 II, P.M. (1946), SBR CP.
[21] *Dawn*, 27 January 1946.
[22] Ibid.

Pants were fattening themselves in the Agha Khan Palace'.[23] The Forward Bloc wanted to save the released INA officers from the 'Congress Goebbels'.[24]

The Muslim League's growing interest in the INA trials had the most far-reaching consequences. The League's disposition towards the INA was lukewarm until they realized the extent of popular enthusiasm the issue was capable of generating. During the November INA agitations in Calcutta, the League's involvement was minimal. However, once the INA officers were released and the credit for this feat was in danger of being claimed exclusively by the Congress-sponsored INA Defence Committee, the League took up the issue with greater seriousness. The fact that one of the three officers was a Muslim made the situation more pressing and embarrassing. The Central Assembly election results had given the League considerable satisfaction – its candidates had trounced almost all rival claimants, including the 'Nationalist Muslims' of the Congress.[25] Yet there were still the provincial elections to be fought.[26] Shah Nawaz's support for the Congress might enable it to recover some lost ground among Muslim voters.

Whatever the realities of communal harmony within the INA, the INA issue had done little to repair the divisions between the Congress and the Muslim League. This was proved once again when Shah Nawaz was being considered as a candidate for the Punjab Legislative Assembly. The idea was floated by the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee in November 1945 while Shah Nawaz was still under trial. The plan was

[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Fay, *The Forgotten Army*, p. 500. Some Congress Muslim candidates did enter the Central Assembly, such as Asaf Ali who contested from the Delhi open constituency.
[26] Ibid., pp. 485-486.

to make him stand from a Muslim reserved constituency that encompassed Rawalpindi.[27] This proposal was quietly withdrawn by December 1945 once the Congress realized that the League had decided to put up its own candidate to fight Shah Nawaz in the same constituency.[28] It proved, on the one hand, that the Congress lacked confidence in the ability even of Shah Nawaz, at the height of his popularity, to defeat a League candidate. On the other, it showed that the League would not play soft-ball against *any* Congress-sponsored Muslim, no matter how much Jinnah was keen to cultivate the support of the INA and the officers on trial.

The mood of the League leaders changed when the INA officers walked free in January 1946. The very fact of his release swelled the popular appeal of Shah Nawaz even further. The League busied itself with devising a strategy for damage control, to show that Shah Nawaz was not a 'confirmed Congressman'. *Dawn*, the League's mouthpiece, published two interviews of Shah Nawaz, both of which claimed that he was thankful to both the Congress and the League for their joint effort at defending him in court. These interviews also alleged that Shah Nawaz wanted all parties to accept the Pakistan demand, if this was the only stumbling block to India's independence.[29] Very soon, however, Shah Nawaz was off to Calcutta at the invitation of Sarat Bose. His association with Sarat Bose, and his public appearances in Calcutta on the latter's initiative, during a time when election propaganda was in full swing, linked him with the Congress in public perception. League leaders felt that their pursuit of INA glory was a lost cause.

[27] Ibid., p. 501.
[28] Ibid., pp. 501-502.
[29] For the two interviews, see: *Dawn*, 5 January 1946 and *Dawn* 19 January 1946.

However, the situation soon took an unexpected turn. As new INA trials began to be staged, events moved fast. First, Captain Burhanuddin, and then Singhara Singh and Fateh Khan, were brought before a Court Martial.[30] The choice of Red Fort as the venue of the trials was very soon recognized to be a blunder, and these were shifted to the Delhi Cantonment at the fringes of the city.[31] The defence was led by the Congress INA Defence Committee. If these trials went well, Congress would be able to claim credit for defending two more Muslim INA personnel. This was, by no means, good news for the Muslim League, especially with provincial elections around the corner. However, Captain Rashid Ali upturned all assumptions by refusing to appoint the Congress Committee as his counsel and asking Muslim League to take responsibility for his legal defence.

The Trial of Captain Rashid Ali

Historians have barely studied the trial of Rashid Ali.[32] This can be explained, to some extent, by the fact that even contemporary newspapers, especially 'nationalist' ones, did not give it the same coverage as the first Red Fort Trial. *Dawn*, the League's mouthpiece, was the exception. Drawing upon reports that appeared in the newspaper during the course of the trial, this section examines the trial in some detail. These details show how difficult it is to accommodate the Rashid Ali agitations in February

[30] Fay, *The Forgotten Army*, pp. 496-497.
[31] *Dawn*, 1 February 1946.
[32] Only Peter Ward Fay has discussed briefly some aspects of the trial. See Fay, *The Forgotten Army*, pp. 497-498.

1946 in Calcutta within the paradigm of 'anti-communal anti-colonial popular protests'.

Rashid Ali's court martial began on 9 January 1946 at Delhi cantonment. He had, as mentioned above, declined to be defended by the Congress INA Defence Committee. Congress was aware that many of the INA accused were Muslims. To head off, perhaps, the accusation that its Defence Committee was a caste-Hindu body, it had chosen Asaf Ali as the convener of the Committee, and defended all Muslim INA personnel who had already been put up for trial until then. But Rashid insisted on being defended by the INA Defence Committee set up by the All-India Muslim League.[33]

Rashid Ali was accused of three offences: waging war against the King-Emperor, cruelty, and abetment of cruelty towards Indian Prisoners of War (PoWs) to induce them to join the INA. Mr. F.R.S. Surita, Counsel for Prosecution, proclaimed in his opening address that he would put forward 'overwhelming evidence' to show that 'the accused practiced brutalities, put Indian PoWs into cages, starved them, made them do fatigues and otherwise ill-treated them if they refused to join the INA.'[34] Rashid Ali had supposedly committed or connived at these atrocities in his capacity as the Officer Commanding of the Bidadari Concentration Camp in Singapore.

On 22 January 1945, Rashid Ali read out a written statement in the Court that created a sensation across India. He said that he had no doubt that non-Muslims were the

[33] *Dawn*, 10 January 1946.
[34] Ibid.

'moving spirit' in the INA.[35] He was also convinced that if the INA had managed to occupy India, it would establish non-Muslim rule with the support of the Japanese Government. In order to safeguard the interests of the Muslims in case the Army's aims were successful, he decided to arm himself. He pleaded that he was 'cut off from the rest of the world' and the only news that was available to him were those that were supplied by the Japanese. Under such 'unprecedented and peculiar circumstances' he had no means of judging whether the Japanese were going to win the War, in which case he felt obliged to do everything to protect the brethren of his own creed – just like most other Muslims in the INA had done, he assured the Court. Thus, he insisted, 'I never waged war against the King. It was never my intention.'[36] As far as allegations of atrocities were concerned, he pleaded that these were 'incorrect' and motivated.[37]

However, one after another, prosecution witnesses recounted harrowing experiences of torture at the Bidadari Camp, either at the hands of Rashid Ali himself, or under his direction and with his knowledge. But, as the Defence Counsel, Mr. Abdul Aziz Khan, pointed out, the chronology of the incidents recounted by the witnesses exculpated Rashid Ali from any role in the torture. Most of the witnesses referred to incidents at a time when Rashid was posted at the General Headquarters as the Deputy Provost Martial. Although he was technically in charge of the Bidadari Camp, the Defence counsel argued, he could not possibly have known what was going on in the Camp on a day-to-day basis. The defence insisted that Rashid could not be held guilty for any ill-treatment the witnesses may have suffered in the Camp till March 1943,

[35] *Dawn*, 23 January 1946.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

when he was appointed the Officer Commanding of the Bidadari Camp. Except in one case, Aziz Khan pointed out, none of the accusations of torture pertained to the period when Rashid had direct responsibility for the Camp.

Jamsher Khan was the sole witness who accused Rashid of torturing him to force him to join the INA after the latter had taken over as the Commander of the Camp. When he had refused to join the INA, Rashid allegedly ordered a Japanese sergeant to beat him up, while he 'stood by and watched'.[38] Aziz Khan objected that Jamsher Khan had, in course of time, joined the INA. By joining the INA, he had himself committed treason against the King and therefore was an accomplice. Under the Evidence Act, an accomplice's evidence could not be taken at face value; it had to be corroborated. As no such corroborative evidence was available, Aziz Khan urged the Court to dismiss Jamsher Khan's testimony.

As far as the charge of waging war against the King was concerned, Aziz Khan argued that the accused never *intended* to do so. He merely wanted to safeguard the interests of Muslims in case INA's occupation of India led to non-Muslim domination in the country. 'Intention', he pointed out, 'always plays an important part in deciding a criminal matter.'[39] Therefore, Rashid Ali could not be held guilty of waging war against the King.

Rashid Ali's defence team had cleverly marshalled their arguments. These moved in directions quite different from those at the first Red Fort trial. Rather than arguing

[38] *Dawn*, 10 January 1946.
[39] Ibid.

for a belligerent status for the INA and drawing attention to international law protecting the rights of such armies, Rashid's defence attempted to dissociate him from the INA and its objectives. The personal intent of the actor was, for his lawyers, the central issue of contention for deciding the charge of treason. On the face of it, this seemed like a smart move. The first trial had proved that the Court Martial had formally refused to accept the belligerent status of the INA. Therefore, by dissociating Rashid's actions from the objectives of the INA, if the Defence Counsel could prove that Rashid Ali had not committed treason at all, then acts of brutality in themselves would not constitute a very grave offence. The first trial had set the accused free even when treason was actually proved. Shah Nawaz, in particular, was found guilty of abetment of murder as well. Rashid Ali's offence, even if he was found guilty of cruelty or of abetting cruel treatment towards PoWs, could not be more serious than that of Shah Nawaz. This course of action, Rashid Ali's defence counsels must have supposed, was sure to secure his release.

However, they were in for a surprise. The Prosecution counsel, Mr. Surita, insisted that many witnesses spoke of torture at Bidadari Camp when Rashid was in over-all charge of the Camp as the Deputy Provost Martial. In all such cases, Surita insisted, 'responsibility must be fixed on the accused'.[40] This amounted, he argued, to 'a solid case of consistent ill-treatment at the hands of the accused, or at his instance, or with his knowledge, for which the accused is responsible'.[41]

[40] *Dawn*, 26 January 1946.
[41] Ibid.

As far as waging war against the King was concerned, Surita pointed out that this charge was proved by the simple fact of Rashid being an INA officer. But even if the argument was accepted that he joined the INA to safeguard Muslim interests, the claim was belied by how 'Muslim after Muslim' who had been called before the Court as witnesses spoke of 'inhuman treatment and constant beatings'.[42]

In the end the Judge-Advocate agreed with the Prosecution counsel. By the very fact of being an officer of the Indian National Army, he agreed, Rashid Ali had broken his oath of loyalty to the King. '[P]articipation in methods designed to increase the power of or improve an organization actively assisting an enemy force against the forces of the Crown was sufficient to prove the charge of treason.[43] As far as the charge of cruelty was concerned, the judge concluded that even if he dismissed the accounts of cruel treatment of other witnesses against Rashid, he had to accept Jamsher Khan's deposition. He insisted that Jamsher Khan's testimony could not be rejected simply because he was an accomplice, as that would deprive him the status of a witness at all.

It became clear that the Court was unlikely to decide in favour of Rashid. Sensing this, the defence counsel Aziz Khan changed his line of argument at the fag end of the trial. He now urged the Court to take 'judicial notice' of the outcome of Shah Nawaz's trial.[44] The latter was found guilty of waging war against the King as well as abetment of murder, despite which he was set free. On that occasion the Advocate-General had also declared that the motive of men of the Indian National Army was

[42] Ibid.
[43] *Dawn*, 29 January 1946.
[44] *Dawn*, 30 January 1946.

'honourable'.[45] Comparison with the Red Fort Trial, as well as drawing attention of the Court to INA's 'honourable' legacy, amounted to backpedaling on what Rashid Ali and his defence team had insisted upon – that the INA was a non-Muslim-dominated, Japanese-sponsored army with the dishonourable aim of enslaving Muslims upon the success of its mission. This sudden shift in strategy was surely prompted by the realization that the 'honourable' personal intentions of Rashid Ali, which had allegedly motivated him to infiltrate into the ranks of the INA to safe-guard his co-religionists, did not impress the Court in the least. On 5 February 1946, *Dawn* announced on its front page that in Rashid Ali's case, the Commander-in-Chief had commuted a sentence of 'transportation for life' to 'seven years' rigorous imprisonment'. He had also confirmed the sentence of cashiering as well as forfeiture of pay and allowances.[46]

For a few days thereafter, brief reports of popular protests against Rashid Ali's conviction began to appear in the newspapers. Reports of demonstrations on the issue did appear in *Dawn* during this time, but these were confined to brief commentaries, which invariably portrayed these as exclusively 'Muslim' protests.[47] Finally, on 8 February 1945, about four days after the sentence had been confirmed, *Dawn* finally devoted an entire editorial entitled 'Discrimination'. It was surely emboldened by Muhammad Ali Jinnah's statement against the Court verdict. He had gone so far as to demand that the Commander-in-Chief had to 'explain and give his reasons and grounds for this discrimination observed by him'. If he refrained from doing so, the Qaid-e-Azam threatened that the Muslims would not 'rest content' and this would

[45] Ibid.
[46] *Dawn*, 5 February 1946.
[47] See *Dawn*, 6 and 7 February 1946.

lead to a 'very serious situation'.[48] The latter had called for all the files pertaining to Rashid Ali's case as well as those pertaining to the first Red Fort trial. He declared that he wanted to personally compare the legal intricacies of these cases.[49]

Jinnah's personal interest in the case prompted other Leaguers to follow their leader. Sir Firoz Khan Noon speculated that Rashid Ali's treatment resulted from the fact that the League had not exploited the case as an 'election stunt' as the Congress had done with the Red Fort trials; or that government was interested in gaining the favour of the Congress for 'some reasons'.[50] Malik Barkat Ali insisted that the Commander-in-Chief owed the 'bewildered public' an explanation for his discrimination.[51] He bemoaned how arbitrary discrimination in 'two identical cases' had caused 'the deepest resentment in Muslim circles'.[52] *Dawn* insisted that Rashid Ali's guilt in the eyes of the law was at least equal to the accused in the Red Fort trial, if not less, especially in comparison with Shah Nawaz. It wondered whether Rashid Ali was victimized for exposing the 'real non-Muslim character' of the INA and for declaring that he, like most other Muslim soldiers, joined the INA to safeguard the interests of his community.[53]

On the face of it, it does appear true that charges against Shah Nawaz were equally, if not more, serious than Rashid Ali's. 'Gross brutality', the most serious charge levelled against Rashid, could not be a greater crime than 'abetment of murder'. Yet, on closer scrutiny, there appears to be a significant difference in the two cases, which

[48] *Dawn*, 8 February 1946.
[49] *Dawn*, 9 February 1946.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] *Dawn*, 8 February 1946.

League propagandists were happy to gloss over. Shah Nawaz, Sahgal and Dhillon were charged for punishments allegedly given and executed in the course of Court Martial proceedings against INA soldiers for indiscipline; these proceedings, moreover, were held in accordance with the procedures the INA adopted from the Indian Army Act of the British Indian Army. The thrust of the defence in the Red Fort trial was to argue for the legitimacy of the INA as a legally constituted army of a legitimate government-in-exile. This, its defence counsel had argued, made the INA entitled to be treated as a defeated but a belligerent army as per provisions of international law. This also empowered the INA to hold Court Martials, sentence the guilty to death and execute such death sentences, just like the British Indian Army. This argument was formally rejected during the trial. During confirmation, however, some scholars feel that the Commander-in-Chief almost granted the INA a belligerent status by remitting the sentence of transportation for life for all three of the accused.[54]

In case of Rashid Ali, however, the charge was substantively different. Accusations of brutality that the Court Martial took cognizance of, and held to have been proved in the course of the trial, consisted of extra-judicial torture. These were not outcomes of Court Martial procedures of the INA, but were apparently aimed at making Indian PoWs *join* the INA. The tortures were directed against those who were yet

[54] The previous chapter has highlighted a range of factors that prompted the government to restrict the scope and scale of the INA trials, and adopt a lenient attitude towards those who had joined the INA. However, there seems to be no record to ascertain exactly what made the Commander-in-Chief commute all the sentences passed by the Court Martial against Shah Nawaz, Dhillon and Sahgal. This was a completely unexpected outcome. Some scholars feel that Auchinleck's actions must have been dictated by a concern for the resentment that the trial had generated among large sections of the public (and also, perhaps. within the rank and file of the British Indian Army). However, once Auchinleck's decision was announced, it created a public perception that it amounted to a *de facto* acceptance of belligerent status for the INA. See, for example, Fay, *The Forgotten Army*, pp. 490-496. Also see A G Noorani, *Indian Political Trials, 1775-1947*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.

to be part of the INA and hence fell outside its jurisdiction. The decision of the Commander-in-Chief, therefore, was not completely arbitrary. Yet the Muslim League propaganda machine insisted that Rashid Ali was unfairly punished because unlike in Shah Nawaz's case, the Muslim League INA Defence Committee had represented him. League propaganda reduced the difference in punishment between the two cases to government's victimization of Muslims who subscribed to the League ideology. Thus, the initial expression of outrage against Rashid Ali's conviction had a clear communal edge. There was no 'anti-communal anti-colonialism' in the initial condemnation of the judgment against Rashid, as voiced in Muslim League propaganda.

To some extent, Nehru's and Prem Sahgal's statements of support for Rashid Ali complicated this complexion of grievances against Rashid Ali's conviction. Nehru disliked the way Rashid had maligned the INA, and had no sympathy for acts of cruelty against PoWs; yet he thought that the Court should have kept in mind that the 'circumstances were very special' and that 'extraordinary and normal standards' could not be applied on any of the INA cases.[55] He concluded that Rashid Ali's 'heavy sentence' ought to be 'revised'.[56] Sahgal, on the other hand, did not like Rashid Ali personally and believed that he was 'a coward and a bully'.[57] He was convinced that Rashid was, in fact, guilty of mistreating PoWs.[58] Yet, he thought that as 'an officer of the Azad Hind Fauj', the army of the 'Provisional Government of Azad Hind', no British Court had the legitimacy to bring him to trial for whatever offence he may

[55] Dawn, 11 February 1946
[56] Ibid.
[57] Fay, *The Forgotten Army*, p. 106.
[58] Ibid.

have committed.[59] But however half-hearted Nehru's and Sahgal's support for Rashid Ali may have been, their condemnation of his conviction imparted a 'non-communal' colour to the popular protests that followed.

Newspapers carried both Nehru's and Sahgal's statements to their subscribers in the morning of 11 February 1946. The same day, a massive protest broke out in the streets of Calcutta that, according to one historian, amounted to an 'Almost Revolution'.[60] The obvious hyperbole aside, it remains extraordinary that an issue with such divisive connotations and such ambivalent support at the top managed to produce such an impressive alliance across political and ideological divides at this fraught moment. Even in comparison to the November INA agitations,[61] the February movement exhibited much greater 'unity' among the participants on the ground.

The following section will examine this in detail, and suggest that this solidarity across party-political affiliations was forged on grounds that had very little to do with the issue of Rashid Ali's conviction. Of course, the apparent injustice meted out to Rashid Ali and the demand for the withdrawal of the sentence passed against him were invoked during the course of the agitations. Yet, it remained a very selective and strategic appropriation of the cause. A general anti-state sentiment seemed to have fuelled the bonds and alliances forged in the course of the street action. In concrete terms, it manifested in robust opposition to the city police. Rashid Ali's conviction was merely a rallying point that facilitated the articulation of a deeper resentment against the state.

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[59] Dawn, 11 February 1946.
[60] Gautam Chattopadhyay, 'The Almost Revolution'.
[61] See Chapter 1 of this thesis.

The Beginning of the Rashid Ali Agitations in Calcutta

Gautam Chattopadhyay, the historian of the Rashid Ali agitations in Calcutta, was also one of its organizers. He was then the Secretary of the Calcutta branch of the All India Students' Federation (AISF) led by the Communist Party of India (CPI). The two essays he wrote on these events are based on official archives and notes from a personal diary.

Despite the apparent thoroughness of Chattopadhyay's account, any researcher will be struck by a curious factual error that persists in both essays. Both contend that Rashid Ali's trial began on 10 February 1946 at 'the famous Red Fort' in Delhi.[62] But even a cursory glance at the newspapers reveals that Rashid Ali's trial had begun more than a month before, on 9 January 1946, and that his sentence was confirmed by the Commander-in-Chief on 4 February 1946, about a week before the Calcutta agitations began. Moreover, Rashid Ali's trial commenced not at the 'famous Red Fort' but at the Delhi Cantonment, on the fringes of the city.[63]

In both essays, Chattopadhyay makes this erroneous statement very briefly, before moving on to a thick description of the street action from 11 February 1946. He had very little interest in the trial of Rashid Ali itself, but this one quick sentence heightened the drama of the agitations that followed, conveying a sense of absolute spontaneity. This oversight facilitated his reconstruction of the events as a 'revolutionary outburst'. This is symptomatic of how the actual trial of Rashid Ali was deployed in

[62] Gautam Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt against the Raj, 1945-46', p. 158; Chattopadhyay, 'The Almost Revolution', p. 429.
[63] Fay, *The Forgotten Army*, pp. 496-498.

the logic of street action, this section will argue, even when the agitation was in progress. To many of its participants, Rashid Ali was a vague symbol around which a powerful anti-government (and, indeed, an anti-police) sentiment coalesced.

This section aims to re-narrate the course of the agitations, starting with 11 February 1946, bringing into focus a range of sources that have hitherto remained unused. Political intelligence gathered by the Special Branch of Calcutta Police constitute by far the richest corpus of contemporary reports gathered while the protests were in progress. This invaluable material has remained unutilized till now. This section will weave insights from this body of fresh archival sources with those that are already known.

On the afternoon of 11 February 1946, Sub-Inspector S. Ahsan of the Special Branch of Calcutta Police went to the Writers' Building, the headquarters of the provincial government, to run some errands. On his way out, he noticed a procession of angry students marching towards Wellington Square.[64] Ahsan estimated that the participants numbered roughly about one hundred and fifty and appeared to be mostly Muslims. He immediately rang up the office of the Assistant Commissioner, Special Branch, to let them know what he had seen and set about making further enquiries.

Ahsan discovered that around half past noon, two policemen came out of Lal Bazar, the police headquarters in Calcutta, to find a procession of about three hundred young men marching towards Dalhousie Square. They were protesting against the

[64] Confidential Diary entry from Sub-Inspector S. Ahsan of S.B., dated 11 February 1946, K.P.M. No. 01693, SB.B. File No. 868D/1, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.

conviction of Rashid Ali. Like the November 1945 protests, the procession headed towards the 'prohibited area' to register their grievances. It was a students' procession and it was composed mainly of Muslim students, but they were carrying flags of the Muslim League and the Congress, as well as a plain green flag. As the two officers tried to talk to the leaders of the procession, some of the younger students 'filtered through and started running towards the Writers' Building'.[65] Vastly outnumbered, these officers called the Lal Bazar headquarters for help. Meanwhile, the processionists had already reached the General Post Office adjacent to Dalhousie Square. The Deputy Commissioner (Southern Division) rushed to the square with a police force and stopped the procession from proceeding any further.

Upon being thus obstructed, the protesters squatted in the middle of the road, dislocating traffic in this busy area. The police asked them to disperse; when they refused, a *lathi*-charge followed. The police attempted to arrest 'ring leaders', which inevitably led to a scuffle.[66] Finally, they arrested thirteen students and took them to the lockup at Lal Bazar. Maniklal Roy Chowdhury was the only Hindu among those arrested. The others were all Muslims. Except for one university student, the rest were school boys, mostly from Presidency Muslim High School and M.L. Jubilee Institution. The procession seemed loosely organized. Students had got together in their respective schools, then assembled at College Street and marched towards Dalhousie Square to protest.

[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.

This brief – and none-too-serious – scuffle with the police became the nucleus of the chain of protests that ensued. As demonstrations intensified, more police *lathi*-charges and arrests followed and the more agitated the demonstrators became. Police brutality slowly emerged as the main plank of popular support for the protests, around which solidarities were forged, glossing over the murkier details of Rashid Ali's trial. Rashid's mud-slinging against the INA and its intentions in open court, the anti-Hindu insinuations in his legal defence, the public projection of the case as a 'Muslim' issue both during and after the trail – these less-palatable dimensions of the cause were underplayed and wider alliances built by reifying the image of the police as the brutal face of a foreign despotic regime that had to be brought to its knees.

Outraged by the first scuffle, Sub-Inspector Ahsan reported, the students marched towards Wellington Square to hold a public meeting.[67] It fell upon Assistant Sub-Inspector Abdul Aziz to cover the proceedings of the meeting on behalf of the Special Branch.[68] Perhaps due to the short notice, he got to the spot slightly later. Protesters had already gathered around a wooden podium from which the speakers were to address the crowd. This made it difficult for government reporters to position themselves at a suitable angle, with the result that none of them could actually see the speakers on stage. The local police had arrived earlier and had deputed twelve 'watchers', but they were of no help. Not only were they hugely outnumbered, the palpable anti-police temper of the gathering did not permit any negotiation with the organizers to secure convenient seats for the reporters.[69] Aziz might not have been

[67] Telephone Message from S.I. S. Ahsan, ibid.
[68] Report of A.S.I. Abdul Aziz on the Rashid Ali Agitation, 11 February 1946 from 1:05 pm to 2:30 pm, ibid.
[69] Ibid.

able to see the speakers, but he could not miss the huge poster of a police constable wearing a red *pugree,* with the Bengali inscription, '*police julum bondho koro*'[70] ('End police atrocity').

Ananda Sankar Bhattacharya of the CPI-controlled Bengal Provincial Students Federation (BPSF) presided over the meeting. It adopted resolutions calling for immediate release of Rashid Ali and other INA prisoners. Speakers denounced British imperialism and called for Congress-League unity.[71] But this optimistic mood was soon threatened. Despite criticizing the government for attempting to create a split between Hindus and Muslims, one speaker, Jamiruddin, did not please everyone when he declared that Rashid Ali was punished only because he was defended by the Muslim League.[72] This remark opened the doors to further allegations of sabotage: the Secretary of the City Muslim League, Mushirul Hossain Chaudhuri, accused the 'BPSF of 18 Mirzapore Street' of preventing students of Scottish Church College from observing the strike called by Muslim students.[73] This organization was an alternative BPSF led by the Congress Socialist Party and the Revolutionary Socialist Party which had played an important role in the November INA agitations in Calcutta in 1945. Ananda Sankar Bhattacharya, who chaired the meeting, had to step in to prevent it from degenerating into squabbles. He told the audience that the party that defended Rashid Ali in court was not the issue at stake. He wanted to tell the 'imperialists' on behalf of everyone in the meeting that 'they were one when fighting imperial-

[70] *Pugree* is a head-dress. 'Police *Julum Bondho Koro*' can be roughly translated as 'Stop Police Atrocities'.
[71] Report of A.S.I. Abdul Aziz on the Rashid Ali Agitation, 11 February 1946 from 1:05 pm to 2:30 p.m., K.P.M. No. 01693, SB.B. File No. 868D/1, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

ism, although they quarrelled among themselves'.[74] To further strengthen the sense of unity among the audience, he began to talk about the police *lathi*-charge earlier in the afternoon. It immediately 'created an excitement among the audience', reported Assistant Sub-Inspector Aziz.[75] Bhattacharya raised the temperature even further when he declared that a *lathi*-charge was now useless as students were ready for bullets.[76] He was astute enough to know that 'police atrocity' was the only battle-cry that could effectively prevent the fractures within the ranks of the protesters.

At the last moment, however, Suhrawardy arrived. Expecting to be the Premier of the Province soon after the elections, he had no intention of repeating Sarat Bose's blunder.[77] With the elections around the corner, Surahwardy could not endanger his popularity, but hoped to act as the safety-valve and control the agitation so that it did not precipitate violence. He spoke in Bengali, declaring that he had come to the meeting 'to associate himself with their object'.[78] He admitted to having criticized the Congress in the past, but now he 'wanted unity with the Congress for acquiring national freedom'. He went even further: 'The day was not far off when the League would unite with the Congress.' Then he turned to pacifying the crowd: 'This movement was made for getting Rashid Ali released. They had come there not for breaking the law.' He insisted that the students should protest 'to prevent which none had a right'; however, 'they should do so lawfully'. The students should keep out of Dal-

[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] See chapter 1 of this thesis. Also, Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt'; Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership, 1945-47'.
[78] Report of A.S.I. Abdul Aziz on the Rashid Ali Agitation, 11 February 1946 from 1:05 pm to 2:30 p.m., K.P.M. No. 01693, SB.B. File No. 868D/1, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.

housie Square as it was a 'protected place'.[79] The protest would be successful only if they remained peaceful and broke no law, he told the protesters. A quick negotiation followed and Ananda Bhattacharya announced that they would take out a procession through a route that avoided Dalhousie Square. So as not to appear to be weak-kneed, he added that they would observe a general strike the following day and register an even stronger protest.[80]

After the meeting ended, on his way out, Suhrawardy briefly spoke to A.G. Khan, a senior Inspector of the Special Branch who had also arrived at the scene by then. He asked that the police should not interfere with the procession as the students had promised him that they would not enter Dalhousie Square.[81] However, Khan immediately noticed a commotion; a section of students was refusing to listen to Suhrawardy and was intent on marching into the prohibited area.[82] He was experienced enough to smell trouble already, and wasted no time in alerting his headquarters.

By now, the procession had built up to about five thousand protesters.[83] After meandering through different streets of the city, it arrived at Clive Street. As Inspector Khan predicted, it forced its way towards Dalhousie Square. The local police stopped the procession immediately, and thousands of protesters squatted on the street.[84] It seemed like a repeat of the November INA agitations, the crucial difference being that

[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Confidential Diary entry from Inspector A.G. Khan of S.B., Calcutta, dated 11 February 1946, ibid.
[82] Telephone message from A.G. Khan at 2:50 p.m., ibid.
[83] Two separate reports give the same figure. See Confidential Diary entry from Inspector A.G. Khan of S.B., Calcutta, dated 11 February 1946, and Confidential Diary entry from Inspector A.G. Khan of S.B., Calcutta, dated 11 February 1946, ibid.
[84] Confidential Diary entry from Inspector A.G. Khan of S.B., Calcutta, dated 11 February 1946, ibid.

top leaders of the Muslim League had arrived at the spot soon after. Muhammad Usman, the Secretary of the Calcutta District Muslim League addressed the protesters, assuring them that all their leaders, including Suhrawardy, were with them in their fight. But the protesters paid him little heed. They got up and 'made a dash to proceed further' when they were met with a brutal *lathi*-charge. A number of students were badly hurt.[85]

This scattered the procession, as participants 'took to their heels' and dispersed in the adjacent streets and by-lanes.[86] Utter chaos followed. Suhrawardy returned to try to pacify the crowd. The situation calmed down, briefly, and the police managed to resume the flow of traffic in the area. No policemen thought this to be the end of the trouble, however. Inspector Khan perceived an ominous current in the air, warning his headquarters of possible 'serious repercussions' the same night or the following day.[87] The police establishment was keenly aware that breaking up processions by police action could only aggravate the situation, as the focus of protests would steadily shift towards 'polize *zulum*'. The Deputy Commissioner specifically instructed policemen on duty 'to do nothing to aggravate the situation'.[88]

Meanwhile, the crowd, dispersed by the *lathi*-charge, had spread throughout the city. Reports of angry mobs stopping traffic and shutting shops poured in from all parts of Calcutta. The evening witnessed a series of direct attacks on policemen and

[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.

police stations. The ease with which anti-police sentiment could be worked up and crowds moved to action was demonstrated by incidents later that evening.

It so happened that Constable Kashi Singh had gone to see his relatives in the Koilaghat Police Station area. On his way home at around 6 pm, he spotted an 'externee' at the junction of Harrison Road and Strand Road, prominent thoroughfares in the north of the city.[89] As part of the War-time security arrangements, a large number of 'bad characters' and 'habitual criminals' had been removed from the Calcutta area under provisions of the Defence of Indian Rules.[90] Many of these 'externment' orders were still in force, and hence the violation of such restrictions still constituted a criminal offence. Kashi Singh arrested the offender and took the help of another Constable, Ram Naish Pandey, to bring him to the police station. However, as they passed through Harrison Road, 'the accused started raising slogan of '*Jai Hind*''.[91] A crowd gathered around them immediately. As 'passersby and local people' started following them, the two Constables began to lose their nerve. They met another Constable, Deo Dutt Misser, at the Harrison Road and Clive Street crossing, and he agreed to accompany the police party. But soon after, they were attacked from behind with brickbats,

[89] Confidential Diary entry of Sub-Inspector S. Ahsan of S.B., Calcutta, dated 11 February 1946, ibid. See Appendix D.

[90] For the special regulations promulgated during the Second World War, see Indivar Kamtekar, 'The End of the Colonial State in India, 1942-47', Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1989; Srimanjari, *Through War and Famine: Bengal 1939-45*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2009; Sanjoy Bhattacharya, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India 1939-45: A Necessary Weapon of War*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001; Sanjoy Bhattacharya, 'An Extremely Troubled Relationship: The British Colonial State and the Communist Party of India, 1942-44' in Biswamoy Pati (ed.), *Turbulent Times: India 1940-44*, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 1998. Externment of 'hooligans' and '*goondas*' has a longer history in Bengal. See Suranjan Das and J.K. Ray, *The Goondas: Towards a Reconstruction of the Calcutta Underworld*, Calcutta: Firma K.L.M., 1996; Suranjan Das, 'Towards an Understanding of Communal Violence in Twentieth Century Bengal', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 23, no. 25, 27 August, 1988.

[91] Confidential Diary entry of Sub-Inspector S. Ahsan of S.B., Calcutta, dated 11 February 1946, Appendix D, K.P.M. No. 01693, SB.B. File No. 868D/1, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.

soda water bottles and *lathis*; the angry crowd 'snatched away the accused and assaulted the Constables'. In the course of the tussle, Deo Dutt Misser's *pugree* fell from his head; when he attempted to recover it, the crowd tore it in front of his eyes and took away his Police Badge as a further sign of humiliation.[92]

Close by, the same evening, Bowbazar Police Station received frantic telephone calls informing them of military lorries aflame at Chittaranjan Avenue. On its way to the spot, the police party met with sudden attacks by 'miscreants and hooligans'.[93] Fearing that they would be encircled by an excited crowd, the policemen beat a hasty retreat. Returning to their own police station was impossible, but they somehow managed to fight their way to the nearby Hare Street *thana*. When they took shelter within the *thana* premises, a crowd of about seven hundred strong attacked the police station. The police attempted a *lathi*-charge, but the situation went beyond control – 'the crowd receded… a little only to charge the police with renewed vigour'.[94] Soon the *thana* gate gave way and the attackers rushed into the building. The outnumbered policemen were completely overwhelmed, and the Officer-in-Charge opened fire on the crowd. Eight rounds of gunfire killed one person and injured several others. The crowd dispersed, but the police station suffered great damage.[95]

Much to the relief of the city police, there was no attempt to occupy Dalhousie Square later that night.[96] But the situation was far from calm. Political leaders, especially of the Muslim League, toured across the city, attempting to persuade angry

[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid. See Appendix G.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.

crowds to return home and remain peaceful. Despite their efforts, at least seven military trucks were set on fire and the public transport system was hugely damaged.[97] The Central Intelligence Officer (CIO) of Calcutta, reporting directly to the Home Department in Delhi, spoke of protesters setting fire to at least twenty lorries. The police made at least twenty-seven arrests, and resorted to firing three or four times in the course of the day.[98]

In an assessment of the day's events, a senior Special Branch officer blamed the politicians for precipitating the crisis. He accused leaders of all political parties of propagating the false idea that 'the police were already "cowed" since the last November riots and that they would not dare to interfere'.[99] Gullible students, he said, had swallowed this propaganda wholesale. 'Moreover', he observed, 'there is a belief among a certain class of Moslems that not only Hindus but the government itself are "afraid" of them.'[100] There was a belief that police would not meddle with a Muslim League procession with support from the CPI and the Congress. 'The result', he lamented, 'is well-known – about fifty injured and one killed.'[101] He concluded, significantly, that only the Muslims of the city were genuinely inspired by a sense of injustice towards Rashid Ali, believing 'that their honour is at stake'.[102] This sentiment was being manipulated by the Communists and 'a certain type' of Congress leader, as they saw in this 'the best chance to make the Moslems and the Government fight each

[97] Telephone message dated 11 February 1946 and 12 February 1946 from S.I. K.N. Ghosh from Section E to A.C., S.B., ibid.
[98] CIO Calcutta's Telephonic Report, dated 12 February 1946, File No. 5/22/46, Home (Political), National Archives of India (Henceforth, NAI).
[99] Report on 11 February 1946 at 7 pm, K.P.M. No. 01693, SB.B. File No. 868D/1, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP. Signature illegible, but probably written by Inspector A.G. Khan.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.

other and thereby drawing the Moslems closer to themselves for a united action against the Government'.[103]

This assessment was far too simplistic, as events the following day proved. Demand for justice for Rashid Ali was strategically voiced at specific moments by different groups that defied any neat classification between Muslim and non-Muslim, even League and non-League groups. The unifying rhetoric remained a common opposition to police brutality.

Escalation and End of the Agitations

12 February 1946 began with a general strike. The police were not taken by surprise. The previous evening, a Special Branch officer had called up the office of *Morning News* – the mouthpiece of the Bengal League patronized by Nazimuddin, the former Premier of Bengal. He had posed as 'a representative of the Taxiwalas' and had asked whether the League had called for a strike the following day so that he could let taxi drivers know.[104] The staff at the office of *Morning News* confirmed that the League had indeed called for a strike, with the support of other parties.

All Indian-owned businesses and shops remained closed on 12 February. A few British-owned retail outlets opened their stores in central Calcutta, only to become

[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.

targets of mob attacks.[105] Indian traders did not require much persuasion to go on strike. They were already restive about increases in the provincial sales tax. This was a new war-time tax imposed in 1941. After the War, instead of it being withdrawn or reduced, the government had enhanced the rate from three quarters of an *anna* to one *anna* in a rupee.[106] Rashid Ali's cause and the issue of police brutality only added fuel to the fire. Thus, what historians have presumed to be spontaneous opposition to Rashid Ali's conviction was, in fact, an amalgamation of several forms of discontent. The economic grievances of Indian traders, resentment against police high-handedness and brutality – all came together to produce solidarities (however fleeting) that cut across community, class and ideology.

Leaders of the agitation summoned a protest meeting in the afternoon at Wellington Square. But even before it began, violence broke out in different parts of the city. Transport had, in any case, come to a standstill since early in the morning. Angry mobs stoned the few private cars that had dared to appear in the streets, dragging the occupants out of vehicles and assaulting them.[107] Even the few rickshaws and bicycles that came out became targets of attack.[108] Thirty-five military vehicles were set on fire and the main thoroughfares blocked with barricades.[109] Soon, rioting spread to the

[105] Consolidated Report regarding Students' Demonstrations including Four Public Meetings on 12 February 1946 at Wellington Square, K.P.M. No. 01694/05, S.B. File No. 868 D(2), P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[106] Governor of Bengal to the Viceroy, 25 February 1946, File No. 5/22/46-Poll (I), Home (Political), NAI. An *anna* was one-sixteenth of an Indian rupee.
[107] C.I.O. Calcutta's telephonic report No. 2, dated 12 February 1946, ibid.
[108] Consolidated Report regarding Students' Demonstrations including Four Public Meetings on 12 February 1946 at Wellington Square, K.P.M. No. 01694/05, S.B. File No. 868 D(2), P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[109] Intelligence Bureau (H.D.), Copy of a Report, dated 12 February 1946, from A/D.M.I., G.S. Branch, New Delhi, File No. 5/22/46-Poll (I), Home (Political), NAI. Also see 'Calcutta Disturbances', General Staff Branch (M.O.2), 12 February 1946, ibid.

northern parts of the city and mobs harassed the civilian police.[110] Angry crowds felled trees to block the main roads at Bhawanipore in south Calcutta.[111] The situation deteriorated to such an extent that the Chief Secretary asked the Eastern Command to make troops available at short notice to come in aid of civil power.[112] By quarter past noon, three companies of troops were stationed at three strategic points in the city.[113] Another company was kept standing at Fort William for reinforcement.[114] The Army was not called out that day, but officers were asked to spend the night at the Eastern Command headquarters so that they were just a phone-call away.[115] Even before the Wellington Square meeting began, intelligence officers concluded that the situation was 'very ugly' and 'worse than that in November 1945', especially given how quickly it flared up 'in a matter of a few hours'.[116]

Whatever position the Muslim League had taken on the first day of the agitation, the Central Intelligence Officer had no doubt that by 12 February, it was actively sponsoring the agitation.[117] The League was gaining strength and support from other student groups and political parties, but its main motivation was the Pakistan cause. Some intelligence officers believed that the Muslim League had taken Rashid Ali's sentence as a sign that the Government was trying to side-line its political demands. The League feared that the Viceroy would form a Central Government with only

[110] Situation Report No. 3 – Calcutta, General Staff Branch, ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] 'Calcutta Disturbances', General Staff Branch (M.O.2), ibid.
[113] Ibid.; Intelligence Bureau (H.D.), Copy of a Report, dated 12 February 1946, from A/D.M.I., G.S. Branch, New Delhi, ibid; Situation Report No. 4 – Calcutta, General Staff Branch (M.O.2), ibid.
[114] Governor of Bengal to Viceroy, dated 13 February 1946, No. 27, ibid.
[115] Situation Report No. 3 – Calcutta, General Staff Branch, ibid.
[116] Intelligence Bureau (H.D.), Copy of a Report, dated 12 February 1946, from A/D.M.I., G.S. Branch, New Delhi, ibid.
[117] C.I.O. Calcutta's telephonic report No. 2, dated 12 February 1946, ibid.

Congress representatives as the first step towards forming a single constitution-making assembly, and dismiss the Pakistan demand. The Muslim League therefore saw the need to create a 'strong atmosphere' with League members ready to court arrests and face repression.[118] To save the Pakistan issue, the League was even prepared to launch 'some sort of direct action'.[119] While there may be some substance to such conjectures, it ignored the other reasons why the League championed the agitation in Calcutta, the forthcoming provincial elections being the most obvious among them.

A Special Branch reporter arrived at Wellington Square well in advance, on this occasion: given how difficult it had been to secure a good spot the previous day, the local *thana* took no chances. Constable Indrasan Tiwari of Muchipara police station had placed tables and chairs for reporters long before protesters began to gather at the park.[120] This was critical, as the anti-police wave that prevailed in the meeting could have induced the crowd to actively prevent the police reporters from covering it. An angry crowd 'jeered at' the Special Branch officer as he took his seat. They started pushing and shoving all government reporters and insisted that they removed the chairs and left the meeting. 'No notice was however taken of this angry demonstration and the tension automatically eased…'[121] But the police were under constant pressure, in a profoundly hostile atmosphere.

By noon, a large number of processions began to pour into Wellington Square, shouting slogans, displaying banners and waving the flags of different parties. Some

[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Consolidated Report regarding Students' Demonstrations including Four Public Meetings on 12 February 1946 at Wellington Square, K.P.M. No. 01694/05, S.B. File No. 868 D(2), P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[121] Ibid.

protesters tied the Congress and the League flags together as a symbol of unity.[122] Notably, the proceedings followed an unusual format. Two meetings followed each other back-to-back: the first was essentially a students' meeting led by the All Bengal Muslim Students' League (ABMSL) and the CPI-sponsored BPSF; the second was addressed mainly by senior leaders of political parties, especially the Muslim League. Almost all prominent leaders of the League attended the meetings, except Nazimuddin.[123] Conjectures about audience strength vary drastically. The Governor's telegram to the Viceroy in the early hours of 13 February 1946 puts the figure at fifty thousand.[124] The Special Branch speculated that there were about ten thousand protesters inside the park, with the overflow crowd estimated at another two thousand.[125]

The first meeting began with Azizur Rahman of ABMSL in the chair. The most remarkable feature of this meeting was that the issue of Rashid Ali's release was barely addressed. Speakers condemned the injustice of trying INA personnel and holding them in camps and prisons in general terms. An ABSML speaker insisted that except for 'a small section of mercenaries', no Indian was loyal to the British Government anymore. It was futile to try the INA soldiers for treason as every Indian was at war

[122] Ibid.
[123] Only the C.I.O.'s report mentioned Nazimuddin's presence at the meeting. See C.I.O. Calcutta's telephonic report No. 2, dated 12 February 1946, File No. 5/22/46-Poll (I), Home (Political), NAI. No other source, including the very detailed running notes of the Special Branch reporters, mentions Nazimuddin or his speeches. For details concerning Rashid Ali agitations, C.I.O.'s reports are less reliable than those of the Special Branch. The former display some striking factual errors. For example, an initial report on 11 February 1946 about the first Wellington Square meeting mentioned that it was organized by Bengal Provincial Student Federation (New), which the CIO corrected in a later report. Compare the afore-mentioned report with the initial 'C.I.O. Calcutta's telephonic report, dated 12.2.46', ibid.
[124] Governor of Bengal to Viceroy, 13 February 1946, No. 27, ibid.
[125] Consolidated Report regarding Students' Demonstrations including Four Public Meetings on 12 February 1946 at Wellington Square, K.P.M. No. 01694/05, S.B. File No. 868 D(2), P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.

against British imperialism.[126] Arabindo Bose of the Congress repeated, 'every youth of India was guilty of waging war against the King and wished to be punished for it'. He called upon the government to 'congratulate' the youth by punishing them. He went on to describe how the INA had 'answered bullets with bullets in Manipur and Imphal', and if the Indian youth had bullets they would have used it against the government.[127] The official discourse on the INA as a mercenary force under Japanese control was turned on its head. Not just the British Indian Army, but the entire administrative establishment that enabled the colonial state to function, including the police, was projected as being run by mercenaries.

Another student leader pointed directly at the police reporters to declare that the 'agents and supporters of the Imperialist Government' should understand that Indians were not willing to tolerate British rule 'even for a day'.[128] Despite his celebration of the INA, he made no specific demand for the withdrawal of the punishment of Rashid Ali's sentence. The resolution passed at the meeting made no reference to it. The central issue remained police atrocities, *lathi*-charges, firings and arrests the previous day.

The other striking feature of this meeting was the vocal demands by student leaders that the political leaders of the main parties chart out a course of action 'consistent with the vindication of the prestige and honour of the nation'.[129] It amounted to a declaration that the leaders would be allowed to guide the protesters *only* on the condition

[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.

that they laid down a programme of action that the followers thought was adequate and worthy. This was reiterated over and over again by several speakers, threatening the political leadership that if they failed to meet the expectations of those they proposed to lead, they would be disregarded. One speaker insisted that the students were ready to follow the directions of the political leaders only if they 'make clear what their next move was going to be'; he had no trust in the leadership, as both the Congress and the Muslim League, he said, had betrayed popular expectations 'on repeated occasions in the past'.[130] This explicit statement of contractual nature of the relationship between the leader and the led, with the latter setting the terms on which the former would be allowed to lead, was the most striking feature of the meeting.

Once this meeting came to an end, the next one started at the same venue immediately after, with Suhrawardy in the chair. Senior leaders of different parties, along with the presidents of important student bodies, such as the CSP and RSP controlled BPSF (New) and the Congress-sponsored Bengal Provincial Students' Congress addressed it. The Muslim League took a leading part, with all its important leaders, except Nazimuddin, explicitly supporting the cause. This meeting, as opposed to the previous one, spoke of the need to secure Rashid Ali's release. Maulana Akram Khan, the President of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, assured the protesters that 'despite his old age and indisposition', he would lead the 'united campaign' of Hindus and Muslims from the 'forefront'.[131] This enthused the crowd, as he set out the aims of the protest. The first object, he insisted, was to secure the release of Rashid Ali, the second was to secure redressal of police brutalities and the third was to remove the

[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

ban on meetings at Dalhousie Square. Abul Hashim, the energetic Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, spoke of how the Congress and the League, who were fighting each other in the election campaign, stood united against British imperialism.[132]

However, it fell upon Suhrawardy, who was on the verge of becoming the Premier of the province, to provide leadership to the demonstration. The entire tenor of his speech was geared towards ensuring that the protests remained under his control. It was the anti-police sentiment that could potentially be the most explosive. If violence against policemen and police stations the previous day was any proof, playing down the anti-police agenda was the only way to keep the protesters under control. Attention could be redirected towards the attainment of distant objectives, such as the release of Rashid Ali and INA prisoners, which would provide at least temporary insurance against uncontrolled conflagrations. Suhrawardy felt, however, that collective violation of the ban on Dalhousie Square was the most suitable programme of action. A controlled procession through the prohibited area could give the programme a radical edge, yet keep violence at bay. Accordingly, he declared his intention of leading a demonstration, along with Satish Das Gupta of the Congress, through Dalhousie Square to show the government that 'Hindus and Muslims could act together in a disciplined manner'. They would voice their demands for the release of Rashid Ali through slogans, of course, but League and Congress volunteers were to 'maintain order'. He warned the protesters that if they could 'display discipline', the government would realize that they were a strong 'disciplined army'. If they failed to do so,

[132] Ibid.

'they would be called rabble'.[133] Finally, he assured that the Government had already accepted their demands of demonstrating at Dalhousie Square and had promised not to interfere. After this, a long procession of protesters proceeded towards the prohibited area under joint League-Congress leadership.

On the face of it, this description of the protest meetings at Wellington Square fits neatly into the paradigm of united bottom-up anti-colonial protests: radicalized students, cutting across community and political affiliations, acting as the 'revolutionary vanguard', managed to force a radical political agenda upon a somewhat shaky and reluctant leadership. As shown above, much of this unity was forged on an anti-police agenda, rather than any ideological opposition to the INA trials themselves. But this does not destabilize the basic premises of existing left-wing historiography of the INA agitations that sees them as a cross-communal anti-colonial agitation with revolutionary potential, eventually frustrated by a bourgeois political elite. This body of scholarship celebrates the fact that even the students' organization affiliated to the Muslim League went to the extent of challenging its own provincial high command, joining hands with other students' organizations which opposed the League.[134] It was as though the ABMSL pushed a radical agenda knowing well that it was sure to embarrass its own leadership.

There is no denying that a degree of unity between different groups with divergent political affiliations was evident in the way the protests took shape. Yet, just a scratch on the surface reveals other dynamics at play. The ABSML's insistence on a pro-

[133] Ibid.
[134] Chattopadhyay, 'The Almost Revolution'; Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt, 1945-46'; Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership, 1945-47'.

gramme of action that was awkward for the League leadership on the eve of provincial elections is a case in point. The shifting contours of alignment within the provincial League, and its relationship with the ABSML can be revealing.

Jinnah had effected a major reorganization of the Muslim League in 1943, insisting on a separation between party work on the one hand and electoral and governmental activities on the other.[135] He had announced that no office-bearer of the party was to hold a parliamentary or government post.[136] This led to an internal rearrangement within the provincial League organizations. At the annual general meeting of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League in Calcutta held from 6 to 8 November 1943, faction fights reached new heights. Suhrawardy resigned from the post of Secretary of the provincial League, replaced by Abul Hashim. A clear line emerged between two powerful factions. One group had Nazimuddin, the Premier of the province, controlling the electoral arena and aligning with Akram Khan, the President of the party in Bengal. Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim collaborated, on the other hand, to lead a rival faction. The first group held sway over the ministerial domain, while the latter came to dominate the party organization.[137] Through the years of the Second World War, the party moved from strength to strength, largely as a result of Hashim's energetic leadership and Suhrawardy's influence among Calcutta's Muslim labourers.[138] By the

[135] Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947*, New Delhi: Impex, 1976, p. 182.
[136] Ibid., see f.n. 25.
[137] Ibid.
[138] For an account of Abul Hashim's career, see Abul Hashim, *In Retrospection*, Dacca: Sabarna Publishers, 1974. For biographical details of Suhrawardy, see Begum Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramulla, *Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy: A Biography*, Karachi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991. Also see Suhrawardy's memoirs: Mohammad H.R. Talukdar (ed.), *Memoirs of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy with a Brief Account of His Life and Work*, Dhaka: University Press, 1987. For Suhrawardy's involvement in Calcutta's Muslim labour politics, see Kenneth McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm: Calcutta, 1918 to 1935*, Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1974.

time of the provincial elections in 1946, the Suhrawardy-Hashim faction emerged as the stronger group, making Suhrawardy the obvious Prime Ministerial candidate.

This sharp divide within the Bengal Muslim League had repercussions on student politics under its banner. In 1944, when elections to the ABSML were held for the last time before Partition, it came to be dominated by the student group led by Azizur Rahman. He was an ally of Nazimuddin in the ministry and Akram Khan in the party. The rival group, aligned with the Suhrawardy-Hashim faction, came into prominence in the Calcutta District organization of the Students' League, but remained marginal within the ABSML.[139]

By 1946, Hashim had clearly overshadowed Akram Khan within the party. Now, on the eve of provincial elections, Suhrawardy was clearly on the verge of capturing the parliamentary domain as well, displacing Nazimuddin and thereby marginalizing the entire Nazimuddin-Akram Khan faction. Internal rivalries within the League organization were thus at their peak when the Rashid Ali protests unfolded in Calcutta. Led by Azizur Rahman, who was aligned with the group that seemed defeated, it is not surprising why the ABSML had no qualms about pushing Suhrawardy into a difficult and embarrassing position. For the latter, it was a trap laid by his enemies within his own party. He could either court unpopularity by dissociating himself from the agitation (as Sarat Bose had done during the INA protests of November 1945), a move he was too shrewd to risk just before the elections. Alternatively, he had to accept the terms dictated by his followers, at least in part, which would invite further

[139] For a detailed discussion of student politics under the aegis of the Muslim League in Bengal, see ibid., pp. 186-190.

displeasure from British officialdom (who clearly had a preference for Nazimuddin). Thus, a story that seems on the surface to be one of pressures from below forcing a radical agenda onto an unwilling leadership, as the 'agency' of the followers dictating the moves of leaders, is in fact far more complex.

In the event, the procession that emerged from Wellington Square passed through various streets of the city without major incident. While passing through Dharmatalla Street, however, the crowd threw brickbats at British-owned shops. They smashed large glass window panes of fashionable showrooms in this central area of Calcutta, and then looted them.[140] One Head Constable was stabbed in the back.[141] Eventually, the procession reached Dalhousie Square, the prohibited area, and staged a demonstration without any opposition from the government. It was only when it was going past the police headquarters at Lal Bazar, on its way back, that the procession ran into trouble. A police lorry, returning to the headquarters loaded with injured Constables, emerged from the opposite direction and confronted the procession head on. A panic-stricken police force, under relentless attack for more than a day, lost its nerve and fired tear-gas shells on the crowd.[142] Mayhem ensued, with protesters attacking the police lorry with brickbats. More tear gas was used to disperse the crowd, aggravating the situation even further. Vehicles parked outside Lal Bazar became objects of attack.

[140] Consolidated Report regarding Students' Demonstrations including Four Public Meetings on 12 February 1946 at Wellington Square, K.P.M. No. 01694/05, S.B. File No. 868 D(2), P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[141] Bengal Governor to Viceroy, 13 February 1946, File No. 5/22/46-Poll (I), Home (Political), NAI.
[142] Ibid.

Thereafter, a policeman noted a fascinating, and unfamiliar, pattern of crowd behaviour in Calcutta:

> The crowd appears to have split up into gangs of hooligans spreading over centre of the town into European residential areas and indulging in looting shops (particularly arms-dealers) and looting and setting fire to private houses, molesting peaceful citizens etc.[143]

According to this version, trouble spread rapidly, engulfing the whole city within a few hours and then spreading to its outskirts. It is difficult, of course, to ascertain the accuracy of this description, coming to us as it does from police sources. It is, of course, overloaded with the prejudices typical of official descriptions of protests that government found difficult to control. Implicit in this report is the assumption that the protesters were, after all, 'hooligans', or at least capable of turning to 'hooliganism' at the slightest provocation. This was characteristic of a 'law and order'-centred perspective of popular protest that justified repression by depoliticizing collective action and criminalizing politics itself. This is a theme we will examine in some detail later. However, the import of this specific description becomes clear in the context of what took place thereafter. The Governor called an emergency meeting with military officers, the Commissioner of Police and other senior officers of his government. 'Being furnished and on advice that situation was such that it was impossible to restore and maintain order…', the Governor 'authorized the invocation of military assistance in aid of civil power'.[144]

Meanwhile, a section of the protesters returned to Wellington Square. Addressing them, Suhrawardy insisted that since the mission of demonstrating at Dalhousie

[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.

Square was achieved, everyone should 'return to their normal life and activities'.[145] This led to some murmurings of protest among the crowd. 'What about Rashid Ali?', some of the protesters wanted to know.[146] One student interrupted Suhrawardy's speech and urged everyone to carry on with their protests. Confusion ensued. Suhrawardy resumed, insisting that no one should pay attention to any suggestion of continuing the agitation, and – in a tone of admonishment – spoke of 'acts of indiscipline amongst processionists'.[147] In a tenor indistinguishable from official pronouncements, he 'strongly condemned acts of hooliganism', insisting that this would not bring 'freedom': 'Police would resort to shooting to stop *goondaism* and in these cases they would act as the servants of the public. Everybody had a home, and family.'[148]

The Governor's radio broadcast soon thereafter had a similar tone. Informing the public that the army had been called out, Richard Casey announced:

> Within a very short time from the holding of the procession, unruly elements started looting shops and setting fire to buildings and transport… peaceful citizens are being molested in many parts of Calcutta. It is impossible to believe that any of the principal political parties are supporting the present state of affairs. The mob are [*sic.*] trying to take charge – and they are not going to be allowed to take charge.[149]

He assured that the police and the army would not 'interfere with any peaceful citizens', but they would take 'all necessary steps' against 'malefactors'. His advice to

[145] Consolidated Report regarding Students' Demonstrations including Four Public Meetings on 12 February 1946 at Wellington Square, K.P.M. No. 01694/05, S.B. File No. 868 D(2), P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Governor of Bengal to Viceroy, No. 27, 13 February 1946, File No. 5/22/46-Poll (I), Home (Political), NAI.

'peaceful citizens' was, 'Keep off the streets and keep out of trouble.'[150] However, the police and the army, he insisted, would not hesitate to 'use their weapons' if they faced any obstruction in the execution of their duties.[151] His concluding remarks are worth quoting at length:

> You will remember that in the course of the last disturbances in late November I was extremely reluctant to ask for the assistance of the army. I am equally reluctant now but I believe that army assistance is essential in the public interest and in these circumstances I have not hesitated to invoke their aid. The lesson to be learnt – for the second time within a few months is that political processions however well intentioned prove nothing. They inevitably lead to public disturbances and casualties. I hope very much that this second costly experience will have its lessons for those responsible for the demonstrations in November and now.[152]

It was, in short, a reiteration of the theme central to bureaucratic attitudes towards politics in India. It was seen as essentially disruptive, inevitably leading to chaos. It was the supposedly neutral arms of the colonial administration – the bureaucracy, the police and the army – that could alone preserve peace in an intrinsically violent society.

From the evening of 12 February 1946, the government unleashed a reign of repression. There is little in the official record that contradicts Gautam Chattopadhyay's description of the ruthlessness with which the army clamped down upon protesters.[153] Given free rein to curb 'conflagrations', state actors made few sound judgements about the objects of repression. Even bystanders and onlookers bore the brunt of the state's show of might. Ordinary people, including women and children, lost their lives to bullets.

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[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.
[153] For vivid descriptions of the indiscriminate violence unleashed on the public of Calcutta once the army was called in, see Chattopadhyay, 'The Almost Revolution'; Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt against the Raj, 1945-46'.

The confrontation between the army and the police on the one hand, and angry demonstrators on the other, continued on 13 February 1946. In a statement early in the afternoon the Commissioner of Police lamented that there was no improvement in the situation. The Central Intelligence Officer reported continuance of 'serious rioting', especially in Muslim-majority areas, and reported that the mob was displaying 'great ferocity'.[154] The government also noted that, since 13 February morning, protesters had begun to adopt 'tip and run tactics'.[155] This involved setting up road blocks and barricades on the main thoroughfares, dispersing on the sight of the police or the army into the surrounding lanes and by-lanes, and then reassembling and replacing the barriers once the police or the army had passed.[156]

Late in the night of 13 February, the Governor issued another radio broadcast, warning people to stay clear of the streets. This time he informed the public that he had authorized the police and the army to open fire to bring the situation under control.[157] This, of course, meant that the whole city was virtually converted into a war zone. This had the desired effect of a 'great stimulant to troops and Police'.[158] A message from the Headquarters of the Eastern Command the following morning mentioned with satisfaction that the Governor's orders for free use of firearms had raised police morale by 200 per cent.[159] 'Firing', it said, 'had a steadying effect' since 13 February night, when the crowd seemed to have had 'quite enough'.[160] By 14 Febru-

[154] CIO Calcutta's telephone report No. 3 received at 3:30 p.m. on 13 February 1946, File No. 5/22/46-Poll (I), Home (Political), NAI.
[155] Governor of Bengal to Viceroy, 13 February 1946, ibid.
[156] Ibid. Also Report of G.E.B. Abell, Private Secretary to the Viceroy, 13 February 1946, ibid.
[157] Governor of Bengal to Viceroy, No. 28, 13 February 1946, ibid.
[158] MIO Calcutta, Situation Report No. 9, 14 February 1946, ibid.
[159] Message from HQ Eastern Command 08:40 hours, 14 February 1946, ibid.
[160] Ibid.

ary 1946, Calcutta seemed to have calmed down. 'Crowds have ceased to stand about and appear to be going about their normal business', reported the Military Intelligence Officer.[161]

Since the aftermath of the demonstrations at Dalhousie Square on 12 February 1946, several political parties attempted to pour oil on troubled waters. Some organizations, such as the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI), tried to prolong the protests. But these were voices from the fringe. All the main political parties began campaigns for putting an end to the agitation. By 15 February, the protests had petered out.

The army was slowly withdrawn. Troops patrolled the city streets till the night of 14 February. Standing military pickets were withdrawn from the streets of Calcutta to test the waters on 15 February.[162] But they were not yet sent back to the barracks.[163] It was not until 18 February that troops were fully and finally withdrawn both from Calcutta and its industrial suburbs.[164]

Conclusion

The INA agitation of February 1946 in Calcutta enlisted participation across political and community divides. Despite the reluctance of some of the associated political parties, such as the Bengal Provincial Students Congress, students affiliated to all ma-

[161] Telephone message from HQ Eastern Command at 15:00 hours, 14 February 1946, General Staff Branch, Situation Report No. 11, ibid.
[162] Governor of Bengal to Viceroy, No. 32, 15 February 1946, ibid.
[163] Also, Situation Report No. 14, telephone report from HQ Eastern Command at 15:45 hours, 15 February 1946, ibid.
[164] Governor of Bengal to Viceroy, No. 36, 18/19 February 1946, ibid.

jor political organizations succeeded in forging solidarities. This, in some cases, almost amounted to open revolt against the party leadership, as seemed to be the case with the All Bengal Muslim Students League.

However, seeing this entirely as pressures from below, radicalizing the political programme despite vacillations of senior party leaderships, is somewhat naïve. Stretching this evidence to argue for an alternative political future for South Asia, depicting it as an 'almost revolution' that could have transformed the history of the subcontinent if taken to its logical conclusion, is an exaggeration.

As this chapter demonstrates, much of this apparent revolt against party high commands, on closer scrutiny, appears far more complex when inter-party rivalries and factional disputes are taken into account.

Also, this chapter emphasizes the need to take the symbols of protests seriously. It shows how solidarities across party-political affiliations and community divides, already solidified into communal identities by then, could only be forged when the actual cause of Rashid Ali, or the divisive tones of the actual arguments made in his defence in Court or by the League propaganda, were relegated to the background. Rashid Ali's cause became extraneous to the logic of the protests, sometimes invoked strategically, but for the most part forgotten. To retain a united front, these protests had to latch on to, and rally around, other symbols, such as government high-handedness and police brutality.

This is not to argue, of course, that by invoking symbols other than Rashid Ali's conviction, the agitations became any less legitimate or 'authentic'. However, it is pertinent to point towards how such apparently salutary anti-imperialist dispositions also created its own regimes of exclusion, the brunt of which, more often than not, fell upon the poor and some of the city's vulnerable minorities. It is perhaps important to recognize how it was the lowest rung of the police, the Constables and Head Constables, not very different in socio-economic status from the urban proletariat of Calcutta, who were mostly the recipients of public wrath. While the Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners went around the city in protected convoys, it is this lowest level of the constabulary that became targets of assaults and humiliation.

Again, Hindu-Muslim solidarity did not necessarily preclude possibilities of discrimination, harassment and victimization against other vulnerable minorities. In South Calcutta, where resistance to the state machinery was the strongest, the 4/3 Gurkha Rifles was deployed by the Eastern Command to bring the area under control.[165] They proved to be quite successful, and undoubtedly, very ruthless. Some Gurkha armed policemen were also employed in different parts of the city. This resentment, however, spilled on to the Nepali community of the city as a whole. A small ethnic minority, mostly a part of the city's casual labouring poor, Nepalis became targets of much harassment. Neighbourhood strongmen, the supposed champions of united anti-colonial resistance, threatened landlords against housing Nepali tenants.[166]

[165] Situation Report No. 7 – Calcutta, General Staff Branch, File No. 5/22/46-Poll (I), Home (Political), NAI.
[166] Confidential diary entry from S.I. N.L. Banerji of S.B., Calcutta, 14 February 1946, K.P.M. No. 01696/05, S.B. File No. 868/46(D)(4), P.M. (1946), CPR, SB.

Some Nepali families panicked and left their homes to take shelter in safer places.[167] Many of them became targets of everyday harassment and humiliation.[168] This essentializing of community identities, holding one responsible for the actions of another merely because both seemed to share a common identity, is the hallmark of communal stigmatization. The protests, no matter how united, were not immune to such vicious propensities against the minorities it obviously excluded.

This is not meant to debunk the agitations, but to argue for a less romanticized reassessment, and also to argue for a less abrupt 'plunge' into communal mayhem from an apparent mood of absolute solidarity represented by the INA agitations. This chapter argues that the importance of the agitation lies in its a deeper questioning of the institutions of the state. The anti-police sentiment that pervaded street action during the February agitations was symptomatic of the state being reduced, in the public imaginary, solely to an instrument of colonial oppression. This was complemented by how the judicial process of Rashid Ali's trial, that rarefied, sacred domain where the state acquires its status as a repository of ultimate justice, was repeatedly questioned and undermined even by the top leaders of political parties. Muslim League's debunking of the trial of Rashid Ali as unfair and biased constituted a crisis of the state's public imaginary, which only became acute when such questionings precipitated popular street action. The Calcutta agitations in February 1946, therefore, need to be situated in the context of a progressive undermining of state authority that would continue, and intensify, over the following months.

[167] Special diary from S.I. K.S. Pandit of S.B., Calcutta, 14 February 1946, ibid.
[168] 'Zone duty in the jurisdiction of Watgunj Police Station, 15 February 1946, K.P.M. No. 01697/05, S.B. File No. 868/46 D(5), P.M. (1946), CPR, SB.

Chapter 3

Communal Antagonism Beyond the Great Calcutta Killing

The historiography of popular politics during decolonization assumes a sharp break between a period marked by cross-communal camaraderie and one characterized by intense communal antagonism.[1] On the other hand, scholars of communalism often chart a long history of the progressive intensification of communal identities and sentiments.[2] A few historians have traced the origins of communalism back to pre-colonial times.[3] Others have argued that its genesis was co-terminus with colonial knowledge-production.[4] Yet, wherever the roots of communal antagonism in the sub-continent may lie, this strand of scholarship usually projects communal violence that accompanied decolonization as the culmination of a long-drawn out process. *Longue duree* histories of communalism move from one instance of major conflagration to another across time.[5] On the other hand, analyses of partition violence, which concen-

[1] Sumit Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership, 1945-47', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 17, no. 14/16, Annual Number, April, 1982, pp. 677-689; Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991.
[2] See, for example, Sandria B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989; Gyanendra Pandey, *Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992; Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal*; William Gould, *Religion and Conflict in Modern South Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
[3] C.A. Bayly, 'The Pre-History of "Communalism"? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1985. David N. Lorenzen, 'Who invented Hinduism?' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 41, no. 4, Oct., 1999.
[4] Pandey, *Construction of Communalism*.
[5] Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*; Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal*.

trate on the last few years of colonial rule, either study patterns of communal consolidation[6] or move from one instance of communal flare-up to another, across space.[7]

Micro-histories of communal violence, which pay close attention to shifts in everyday inter-community relations, remain scarce. It is this lacuna that this chapter seeks to address by delving into a rich, though fragmentary, corpus of material that throws light on everyday life in Calcutta on the eve of partition. In so doing, it deliberately takes the story of communal antagonism in the last days of the Raj beyond the Great Calcutta Killing. Also known as the August Killing, it has been hailed as the inaugural moment of partition violence, and hence has received considerable scholarly attention in recent years.[8] This chapter will demonstrate that instances of major spectacular communal bloodshed often conceal patterns of 'routine violence'.[9] While the former reveals how the state's authority is visibly challenged, the low-scale subterranean currents of daily violence throws light on the slower but more sustained processes of the erosion of the state power.

The chapter begins with a series of cases that show how communal hostility pervaded Calcutta's social fabric during the period when historians have assumed Hindu-

[6] Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
[7] Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
[8] Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal;* Rakesh Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine to Noakhali*, New Delhi, London: Sage, 2005; Anjan Ghosh, 'Partial Truths: Rumour and Communal Violence in South Asia, 1946-92', PhD Thesis, University of Michigan, 1998; Nariaki Nakazato, 'Role of Colonial Administration, 'Riot Systems' and Local Networks during the Calcutta Disturbances of August 1946' in Tanika Sarkar and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (eds.), *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades*, New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2015.
[9] Gyanendra Pandey, *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006

Muslim solidarity to be the dominant political mood. It goes further to argue that enforcement of communal 'unity' by vigilante groups was symptomatic of a deeper inter-community hostility rather than harmony.

The second section takes the story to the world of provincial politics. It shows that even at this relatively higher level of politics, attempts to forge political alliances across party lines were dictated more by political pragmatism than altruistic motives. Suhrawardy's Muslim League Ministry, which assumed office in early 1946, attempted to form a coalition with the Congress. This section argues that despite its outward appearance as communal rapprochement, the effort was symptomatic of Suhrawardy's vulnerability to intra-party intrigues. The Great Calcutta Killing, this section argues, has to be seen in the context of the Suhrawardy government's fragility, together with the subterranean current of communal animosity that characterized everyday life in Calcutta well before August 1946.

Next, the chapter explores the aftermath of the Great Calcutta Killing. It charts the constant apprehensions and fears of a communal flare-up both among Hindu and Muslim groups, fuelled by rumour and propaganda. The fourth section moves back to the domain of organized politics to delineate patterns of communal consolidation in the formal political domain. It shows how, despite the persistence of inter-party competition and factional rivalries, groups representing Hindus and Muslims emerged as antagonistic political formations, speaking with one voice while representing the case of the community they claimed to represent.

The final section outlines broad contours along which everyday economic life was reorganized in Calcutta under the impact of communal suspicion and violence. It seeks to understand, albeit on the basis of fragmentary evidence, how widespread fear, apprehensions, and loss of faith in the state dislocated economic relations.

Communal Violence in the Time of Communal Solidarity

Suranjan Das, historian of communal riots in twentieth century colonial Bengal, posits a clear distinction between religious and communal conflict. The former, according to Das, constituted violence provoked by 'sectarian and doctrinaire differences', whereas communal conflict involved the quest for 'political power and economic resources'. Religious consciousness, according to Das, constituted 'personal allegiance to a set of practices and dogmas', in the hope of 'rewards from a transcendental reality'. Communalism, by contrast, entailed attempts at securing 'worldly advantages at the expense of other communities'.[10] However, as numerous instances of violence in colonial India show, the line between the two was often blurred. Communal conflict, especially Hindu-Muslim conflict, often revealed the impulse to secure material benefit, even at the cost of violence, precisely to create or preserve conditions for religious or spiritual endeavour. At least, that is how social groups participating in communal violence often described the issues at stake, to themselves and to their co-religionists. Conflicts around sacred space, and the more recent twentieth-century development of controversies around playing music in the vicinity of such sacred space or on religious occasions, epitomizes this blurring between 'purely' reli-

[10] Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal.*

gious and 'purely' communal conflicts. Religious practices in the subcontinent were never purely personal affairs, and hence demands over public space and the right to perform public acts – such as playing music and organizing religious processions on certain occasions or at certain places – constituted arenas where religious and communal conflicts could merge.[11]

The months after the end of the Second World War, despite their reputation for cross-communal solidarity, did not witness even a temporary suspension of patterns of conflict usually associated with communal animosity. The police archives of the period in Calcutta are replete with such examples.

Historians have traced violent conflict between social groups imbued with 'community consciousness' in Bengal at least since the late-nineteenth century. Although Dipesh Chakrabarty and Subho Basu differ on the precise nature of the conflict that gripped Calcutta's industrial neighbourhoods in the 1890s, they show at least some characteristics of what later came to be identified as hallmarks of communal antagonism.[12] Nationalist ideas, too, as they emerged in late nineteenth century Bengal, showed distinct signs of Hindu chauvinism.[13] In the early twentieth century, when mass agitations on 'national' political issues became increasingly widespread, the

[11] See Freitag, *Collective Action and Community.*
[12] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Communal Riots and Labour: Bengal's Jute Mill-Hands in the 1890s', *Past and Present*, no. 91, May, 1981; Subho Basu, 'Strikes and 'Communal Riots' in Calcutta in the 1890s: Industrial Workers, Bhadralok Nationalist Leadership and the Colonial State', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 32, no. 4, October 1998.
[13] The large body of literature on this subject includes Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001; Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997; Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought in the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

mobilizing rhetoric and the programme of action had a strong Hindu bias.[14] Simultaneously, in the course of the early twentieth century, increasingly conscious of their numerical advantage, Bengali Muslims emerged as a powerful political force.[15] During the late 1930s, Muslim political formations came to dominate provincial politics, to the deep irritation and growing alarm of the Hindu *bhadralok* elites.[16] In the course of the twentieth century, numerous riots had broken out in Calcutta, which showed some elements of solidification of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' identities. The outbreak of communal violence in 1926, some historians argue,[17] had a deep impact on Hindu-Muslim relations in Calcutta, which was only further accentuated with the increasing prominence of the Muslim League in Bengal politics from the 1930s and the consequent marginalization of Hindu political elites.[18] In this context, the instances of low-scale but continuous undercurrent of communal animosity during the last years of the war, recounted below, should not come as a surprise.

In August 1945, a small patch under a *pipul* tree on a pavement beside the Belliaghata Road in Calcutta became the theatre of intense controversy.[19] Some local Hindus considered the tree sacred and worshipped a few stones placed under it. During the Id festival, however, Muslims of the locality would gather under the tree to

[14] Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, 1903-1908, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973.
[15] Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947*, New Delhi: Impex, 1976.
[16] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided.*
[17] Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal;* P. K. Dutta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth Century Bengal*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999; Kenneth McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm: Calcutta, 1918 to 1935*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1973.
[18] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*; Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal.*
[19] 'Communal Tension over the Construction of a Temple at or near 8/1, Beliaghata Road on the Footpath', K.P.M. No. 01485/05, S.B. File No. 506/45, P.M. (1945), Special Branch Records, Calcutta Police (Henceforth SBR, CP).

recite prayers. The Imam who conducted these prayers would stand in the tree's shade while preaching to the congregation.

Trouble started when Haranandan Ray, a prominent Hindu of the locality, and Baccha Tewary, the local priest, erected a small permanent structure at the site to serve as a Hindu temple. The Muslims resented this and complained to the Calcutta Corporation. The Corporation duly served a notice on Haranandan and Baccha Tewary, instructing them to demolish the unauthorized structure. Both men ignored the notice.

The 'neighbourhood' controversy gripped the attention of the wider Calcutta public when Muhammad Usman, the Calcutta District Secretary of the Muslim League, intervened on behalf of the Muslims, and filed a police complaint. This escalated tensions, and the issue became a city-wide concern. When the police began their enquiries on 18 August 1945, tension was palpable in the locality. Haranandan and Baccha Tewary's prosecution at the Municipal Magistrate's court had, meanwhile, further fuelled suspicion between the communities in the area. The police reported that ordinary social contact between Hindus and Muslims, previously rather cordial, had, indeed, completely broken down.[20]

Such conflicts were by no means a post-war development. Another controversy around a sacred site had erupted a few months before, in November 1944, around a mosque in Arpuli Lane. After a dispute about a plot of land in the area, Satyendra Lal Pyne, a lawyer, had obtained a High Court decree giving him possession of the land.

[20] Ibid.

Trouble began on 7 November 1945 when Pyne, with the help of a High Court official and the local police, began to build a wall around the plot.[21] A part of the mosque fell within its precincts, and Pyne's masons demolished a water reservoir, a urinal and a pillar belonging to the mosque.[22] This caused consternation in the area and a crowd of about three hundred Muslims gathered to stage a protest. Tension escalated. Muhammad Usman, the Secretary of the Calcutta League, and Nasiruddin Khondkar of the Khilafat Committee, both arrived to try to pacify the crowd. Eventually Usman wrote to the Commissioner of Police, urging him to stop the demolition and filed a petition at the High Court for a stay order on the execution of the decree. The situation eased a little, only to flare up again a few days later, when Pyne's men attempted once again to construct the wall.[23] Despite police protection, the situation got out of hand when a crowd, composed of local Muslims, demolished the wall soon after it reached barely a foot above ground. Four members of the Muslim National Guard appeared in full uniform, wielding *lathis*, with about five hundred men following them. The Deputy Commissioner of the Southern Division and the Assistant Commissioner of South Town rushed to Arpuli Lane and managed to prevent violence.

In a vain attempt to deal with the conflict, the police kept delaying the construction of the wall. Each time Pyne attempted to execute the High Court order, crowds gathered within minutes and violence seemed imminent. Rumours were soon afloat that Pyne planned to demolish the whole mosque, with the result that, as days passed, the

[21] 'Trouble over the possession of land adjoining a mosque in Arpuli Lane', 8 November 1944, K.P.M. No. 01484/05; File No. 506/44, P.M. (1944), CPR, SB.
[22] For similar cases in the United Provinces, see Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*.
[23] 'Trouble over the possession of land adjoining a mosque in Arpuli Lane', 13 November 1944, K.P.M. No. 01484/05; File No. 506/44, P.M. (1944), CPR, SB.

size of the protesting crowds swelled, drawing participants from all parts of the city.[24] Now, as the issue began to have city-wide dimensions, both the League and the Khilafat Committee leaders kept away, fearing that the crowd would not listen to them. They were aware they could rapidly become unpopular if they tried to prevent the agitations, and that they would lose their authority if they failed to persuade 'their' people to back down.[25]

On 13 November, a mob gathered around Pyne's house and attempted to break in. Police tried to prevent this, and one Constable was badly beaten up in the process.[26] The situation calmed down when the High Court issued a stay order on the construction the following day.[27] Only after this did *Asre Jadid* and *Rozana Hind*, both popular newspapers among Calcutta Muslims, publish articles asking the public to remain calm. The latter also warned that any breach of peace 'would be bad for the Muslims of their community in the Arpuli Lane area'.[28] On 7 December 1944, the High Court issued an injunction against Pyne, while scheduling the next hearing in February 1945. The Court also directed the 'Muslims' to deposit a sum of five hundred rupees as compensation for the financial loss Pyne had suffered. It also issued a directive to the Muslims that they were not to rebuild those parts of the mosque that had already been demolished.[29] The deposit was raised by 'the Muslims of Arpuli Lane'[30] through

[24] 'Trouble over the possession of land adjoining a mosque in Arpuli Lane', 14 November 1944, ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] 'Trouble over the possession of land adjoining a mosque in Arpuli Lane', 15 November 1944, ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] 'Trouble over the possession of land adjoining a mosque in Arpuli Lane', 16 November 1944, ibid.
[29] 'Arpuli Lane Mosque Incident', 9 December 1946, ibid.
[30] Ibid.

an organization that called itself the 'Arpuli Lane Mosque Protection Committee'.[31] By February 1945, when the next Court hearing took place, the issue seemed to have fizzled out, and no further records are available of what became of the dispute. What remains significant, however, is not simply that huge crowds could be mobilized so quickly on such a local issue, but that entire institutional structures resisting assaults on communal interests could spring up overnight. The 'Arpuli Lane Mosque Protection Committee' was set up in the house of a Muslim resident of Arpuli Lane on 3 December 1944 to organize the protests, collect funds and arrange legal defence to fight the case in Court. Although constituted at the spur of the moment, it did not lack the paraphernalia of full-fledged posts of President and Treasurer. Local Muslims elected the candidates for both positions.[32]

Historians have written a great deal about how controversies about 'music before mosques' precipitated communal violence.[33] In Bengal, Das points out, this did not become a contentious issue till as late as the 1930s.[34] Yet, just days before the agitations against the Red Fort trial broke out in Calcutta – seen as a great moment of Hindu-Muslim solidarity – tension escalated around a procession that passed beside a mosque at European Asylum Lane.[35]

The Kali Puja festival was often a source of trouble in Bengal. The worship of the deity usually began late at night and, unlike most Hindu religious festivals, alcohol

[31] *Asre Jadid,* 5 December 1944, quoted in 'Muslim Affairs – 7.12.44', ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal.*
[34] Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal.*
[35] 'Short lived communal tension in connection with the immersion ceremony of Goddess Kali', Miscellaneous, 7 November 1945, K.P.M. No. 01485/05, S.B. File No. 506/45, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.

consumption formed a part of the celebrations. Immersion processions of the goddess frequently led to street brawls. The administration remained watchful against drunken clashes throughout his period. The procession in question was one such Kali immersion procession, which made a great deal of noise and played drums 'in the very near vicinity' of a mosque, allegedly to intimidate the congregation.[36] A mob gathered almost instantly to challenge those in the procession. Local police had to intervene to prevent a violent affray.

A month later in December 1945, another controversy erupted, this time around a Muharram procession. It clashed with a group of students who were, ironically enough, preparing for Nehru's speech at the Senate Hall of Calcutta University.[37] Nehru was visiting Calcutta to attend the All India Congress Committee meeting.[38] He had delivered several speeches in praise of the Indian National Army (INA) – the very issue that had supposedly unified Calcutta's Hindus and Muslims in a bond of friendship and cooperation.[39] This time, however, as the procession approached the Senate Hall, a bunch of students began to recite poetry, using the microphones attached to roadside stalls, on the pretext of testing them for Nehru's address later that evening. When members of the Muharram procession protested against this deliberate disturbance, some students apparently threw brickbats. The local police had to escort the procession to its destination to prevent further violence. The incident led to inju-

[36] Ibid.
[37] 'Communal clash in College Street near the Senate House on 11.12.45', ibid.
[38] See Peter Ward Fay, *The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945*, p. 503.
[39] Sumit Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership'; Gautam Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt against the Raj, 1945-46' in Amit Kumar Gupta (ed.), *Myth and Reality: The Struggle for Freedom in India*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1987; Gautam Chattopadhyay, 'The Almost Revolution: A Case Study of India in February 1946' in Barun De (ed.), *Essays in Honour of Prof. S.C. Sarkar*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1976.

ries on both sides and some damage to property, including the smashing of a portrait of Subhas Bose, the INA leader and the icon of Hindu-Muslim unity at this juncture.[40]

Congress-Muslim League unity in late 1945, so easily equated with Hindu-Muslim solidarity, also entailed, on occasion, the enforcement of such so-called 'unity' by coercion, by its local champions and self-appointed guardians. For example, Muslim League flags hoisted at the Post-Graduate Muslim Women's Hostel in North Calcutta invited the wrath of a bunch of Hindu boys in the area.[41] One of them, claiming membership of a 'Subhas Sangha',[42] handed a letter to the Hostel Superintendent demanding that she pair the League flag with a 'national flag'. When this did not yield the desired result, they threatened the hostel *darwan* that they would enter the hostel by force and remove the League flag if their demands were not fulfilled.

The hostel soon became the target of brickbat-throwing from neighbourhood buildings. This escalated to the point when the beleaguered Hostel Superintendent had to report the matter to the police, who identified one of the boys, and also the landlord of the house from where brickbats were thrown, and took them to the local police station to be 'warned'.[43] The *thana* also posted a Constable at the hostel gate to 'keep [the] peace'.[44] There the matter rested, but it proved that over enthusiasm for unity was often a symptom of its fragility.

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[40] 'Communal clash in College Street near the Senate House on 11.12.45', 7 November 1945, K.P.M. No. 01485/05, S.B. File No. 506/45, P.M. (1945), SBR, CP.
[41] 'Communal tension concerning the hoisting of a Muslim League flag on 11.12.45 on the roof of the Post Graduate Muslim Women's Hostel at 26, Vivekananda Road', 17 December 1945, ibid.
[42] A volunteer organization supposedly organized to uphold the ideals and legacy of Subhas Chandra Bose, the INA leader. Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.

Incidents occurring outside Calcutta also affected the city. Calcutta had a vibrant press culture. Many important newspapers, printed in English and the vernaculars – whether Urdu, Bangla or Hindi – were published and based in the city. Their prestige and popularity often extended well beyond Bengal. Letters to the editors of many of these newspapers poured in not only from the districts but also from the neighbouring provinces. A letter to the Editor of *Morning News*, from Abdul Jabbar Khan in Bihar, for example, spoke of how Muslims of that province looked upon this newspaper 'as the champion of their cause' and urged him to 'justify their expectations' by publishing items that spoke of the woes of Muslims in Muslim-minority provinces such as Bihar.[45] Sometimes these letters spoke of the quotidian oppressions suffered by one community in the hands of the other;[46] on other occasions, newspapers themselves were attacked for their editorial stance.[47] Many such letters were intercepted at the post offices, but others reached the offices of newspapers. Some of these papers obliged by publishing such news of communal oppression and were glad to stoke the fires of controversy and communal hatred. This was evident even in late 1945 and early 1946. Take, for instance, an article in the Bengali daily, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, in December 1945. This was about a seventy-year-old Muslim warden of the Midnapore Central Jail whose profession was government service but whose passion, allegedly, was to convert Hindus to Islam.[48] In order to convert a Hindu prisoner to Islam, the paper reported, he had forced him to read the Kalma, observe the Ramzan

[45] M. Abdul Jabbar Khan, Purnea to the Editor, *Morning News*, Calcutta, 2 March 1946, ibid.
[46] Ibid. Also see Officer-in-Charge, Muslim League Election Office, Malda to the Editor, *Morning News*, 27 February 1946, ibid.
[47] St. John Smith, Bombay to the Editor, *The Statesman*, 21 February 1946, ibid. The police suspected that the writer of this letter had used a pseudonym.
[48] *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 12 November 1945.

fasts and made him consume 'roza food'[49] – the last was, of course, an insinuation that he was compelled to eat beef.

The nature of inter-community conflict, as shown above, make the distinction between 'religious' and 'communal' animosity unsustainable. As examples of such low-key but pervasive Hindu-Muslim animosity across this period – a period of supposedly cross-communal camaraderie – show that the communal violence that gripped Calcutta in the latter part of 1946 was not a sudden development after all. The Great Calcutta Killing represented a sharp rise in the communal temperature, precipitated when certain imperatives in the domain of high politics intersected with everyday inter-community tensions already rippling beneath the surface.

Towards the Great Calcutta Killing

Several historians consider the Rashid Ali agitation of February 1946 as the high watermark of Hindu-Muslim unity in Calcutta.[50] As discussed in earlier chapters, this was frequently equated with Congress-League unity. The arrival of the Cabinet Mission in India to discuss the terms of British imperial disentanglement with Indian leaders brought the divisions in Indian political life back into the limelight. As public attention shifted to the negotiation chambers of New Delhi and Simla, a new dynamic

[49] Ibid.
[50] This assumption is most explicitly stated in Sumit Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership, 1945-47', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 17, no. 14/16, Annual Number, April, 1982; Gautam Chattopadhyay, 'The Almost Revolution: A Case Study of India in February 1946' in Barun De (ed.), *Essays in Honour of Prof. S.C. Sarkar*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1976. Also see Gautam Chattopadhyay, 'Bengal Students in Revolt against the Raj, 1945-46' in Amit Kumar Gupta (ed.), *Myth and Reality: The Struggle for Freedom in India*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1987.

emerged in Bengal politics. While F.J. Burrows, the new Governor of the province, replaced Casey on 19 February 1946,[51] polling for the provincial elections were scheduled from 17 to 24 March.[52] On the surface, Bengal politics still appeared to exhibit signs of a rapprochement between the Congress and the League. Yet a careful assessment reveals other, less high-minded, factors behind the drive for inter-party alliances.

Despite government's anticipation of violence, the elections went smoothly.[53] Election results in Bengal confirmed the popular appeal of both the League and the Congress. Smaller parties managed to secure very few seats.[54] The League registered the most spectacular victory, winning one hundred and thirteen of the total one hundred and twenty-one Muslim seats, making it the largest single party in the legislature. The Governor invited Suhrawardy, the leader of the Bengal Muslim League Parliamentary Party, on 2 April 1946 to form a Ministry.[55] Suhrawardy accepted the invitation but said he wanted to negotiate a compromise with the Congress in the hope of constituting a League-Congress Coalition Ministry.[56] The gesture can be read as a continuation of the spirit of communal unity fostered in street camaraderie during the INA protests. Unsurprisingly, Suhrawardy's own public explanation for his move was couched in terms of lofty idealism: 'in the interests of stability and for the more effec-

[51] Burrows to Wavell, 21 March 1946, L/PJ/5/153, 1946, India Office Records (Henceforth IOR).
[52] Secret Report on the Political Situation in Bengal (Henceforth SRPSB) for the first half of March 1946, ibid.
[53] SRPSB for the second half of March 1946, ibid; SRPSB for the first half of April 1946, ibid; Burrows to Wavell, 11 April 1946, ibid.
[54] For Bengal provincial election results, see L/PJ/8/475, IOR; *Indian Annual Register*, 1946, vol. I, January-June. Also see Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, pp. 229-230; Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, pp. 197-198; Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1936-1947*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1987.
[55] Burrows to Wavell, 11 April 1946, L/PJ/5/153, 1946, IOR.
[56] Burrows to Wavell, 23 April 1946, ibid.

tive implementing of [p]rovincial policy in matters of such importance to the population as food and cloth supplies and post-war development.'[57]

Below the surface, however, other dynamics were at play. The League position in the Assembly, taken as a whole, seemed comfortable and strong. When the intra-party dynamics of the Bengal League was factored in, however, the Ministry was far more vulnerable. Leadership battles within the provincial League had created deep fissures between two rival factions – one led by Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim and the other by Nazimuddin and Akram Khan.[58] After the elections, the division between the factions had become too wide to foreclose any realistic possibilities of building bridges. Suhrawardy thought it expedient not to facilitate interference in the working of his Ministry by inviting his rivals to join it. Instead, he decided to reward and work only with his own supporters. Only one among eleven Ministers and one among twelve Parliamentary Secretaries were chosen from the rival faction.[59] Under these circumstances, cultivating new allies outside his party made perfect political sense. Congress, being the largest group in the opposition, was the obvious choice. If such an alliance were ever possible, this was the time to attempt it. The more provinces in which Congress was in charge, the stronger its position was going to be in negotiations with the Cabinet Mission. Moreover, political impotence had plagued the Bengal Congress ever since provincial self-government came into effect in 1937. Deprived of power by the intransigence of its own High Command on earlier occasions, there was

[57] Ibid.
[58] See chapter two of this thesis. For detailed discussions, see Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1936-1947*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1987.
[59] Among his rival faction, only Muazzamuddin Hossain was retained as Minister and Nasarulla as Parliamentary Secretary. See Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, p. 203.

every chance that the provincial Congress leadership would be keen on a new offer.[60] For Suhrawardy, such a power-sharing arrangement could give his Ministry an inclusive complexion while buttressing his position in the legislature, protecting him from enemies within his own party.

Suhrawardy's negotiations with the Bengal Congress quickly collapsed. Cooperation between the League and the Congress at an all-India level had often stalled over the former's exclusive claim to represent Indian Muslims and the latter's insistence on its right to speak for all communities, including Muslims. On this occasion, there were other reasons for failure. Despite posing as a secular party and claiming the 'non-communal' legacy of the INA, the Congress had no base whatsoever among Bengal's Muslims. The Bengal Congress had not a single prominent Muslim candidate whom it could push for inclusion in the proposed Coalition Ministry.[61] The negotiations, which dragged on for more than a fortnight, broke down instead on issues to do with the loaves and fishes of office. The Bengal Congress would not accept Suhrawardy's offer of five seats in a Cabinet of twelve members. It wanted six seats in a Cabinet of thirteen or five seats in a Cabinet of eleven. Eventually, it accepted five seats in a twelve-member Cabinet provided the League agreed to the inclusion of an independent Hindu as the thirteenth member. When this was denied, the Congress agreed on a five to seven arrangement, if the League accepted Fazlul Huq, the former Premier of Bengal, as the Speaker of the Bengal Legislative Assembly.

[60] For details on the conflict between Bengal Congress leaders and the High Command, see Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*.
[61] Burrows to Wavell, 23 April 1946, L/PJ/5/153, 1946, IOR.

Congress' new-found love for Fazlul Huq is difficult to explain, but Huq made it clear that Congress had proposed his name without consulting him. He went to the extent of indicating that he would refuse the post even if it was offered to him, for 'the office of the Speaker in the present Assembly carries no more honour or dignity than that of the Superintendent of a zoological garden or the Manager of a lunatic asylum'.[62] The Governor's conclusion, correct or otherwise, was that Huq's hyperbole was 'in fact a case of "sour grapes" as it has been common property for some time that Fazlul Huq coveted the Speakership'.[63]

The other issue was the allocation of government departments, which also revealed the Bengal Congress' political inclinations. Retaining the Home Department for himself, Suhrawardy had offered the Civil Supplies portfolio to the Congress. The latter, however, insisted upon the departments of Education and Local Self-Government.[64] The choice of ministries reveals the social base of the Congress in Bengal. It claimed precisely those ministries that could play critical roles in safeguarding *bhadralok* privilege. It was this upper caste Hindu landed elite of Bengal, posturing as the custodians of Bengal's cultural and educational superiority, who had felt most threatened under the provincial ministries ever since 1937. The *bhadralok* had looked upon attempts at reforms of secondary education and 'interference' in the affairs of Calcutta University by the Bengal Government as assaults on their dominance.[65] It felt threatened by the increasing influence of a growing Muslim middle class in Municipal Committees, District Boards, Union Boards, Debt Settlement Boards and other institutions of local

[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] See Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*; Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*.

government in small towns and district headquarters, even in areas where the Hindus enjoyed numerical majority.[66] So Congress demanded exactly those departments that could safeguard *bhadralok* interests most effectively. It also held these demands to be absolutely non-negotiable. Such attitudes speak volumes about the upper-caste Hindu complexion of the Congress in Bengal.

Negotiations with the Congress finally collapsed on 20 April 1946. Suhrawardy went ahead and formed a ministry with only his own supporters. However, a solid group of thirty-five members within the Assembly continued to support the Nazimuddin-Akram Khan faction. This severely restricted the Ministry's ability to function.[67]

Given the vulnerability of Suhrawardy's ministry, his position threatened by constant intrigues by his opponents, he turned towards the League High Command for support. Jinnah had always sided with Nazimuddin in the Bengal League and had looked upon Suhrawardy with suspicion. Suhrawardy now wanted to cultivate Jinnah's support and was desperate to assure him of his obedience.

League politics at the all-India level in mid-1946 is too well-known to be repeated.[68] No sooner had some agreement been reached at the negotiations between Indian political leaders and the Cabinet Mission than it collapsed, primarily due to Congress intransigence. The League, which had previously approved the Cabinet Mission pro-

[66] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, pp. 203-219.
[67] See Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, p. 203.
[68] For details of the Cabinet Mission negotiations and its collapse, see Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Partition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; Anita Inder Singh, *The Origins of the Partition of India, 1936-1947*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990.

posals, now revised their stance, withdrew from all further negotiations with the Congress and the British government, and adopted 'Direct Action' as the method to win the demand for Pakistan. Jinnah remained vague about what 'Direct Action' really entailed. But in Calcutta this led to an unprecedented communal 'fury'. About five thousand people were butchered in the streets of the city.[69]

The reason why on 16 August 1946 no other part of India except Calcutta erupted in violence remains a mystery. It is arguable that this could be attributed to Suhrawardy's 'overenthusiasm' in implementing Jinnah's directives to win his confidence.[70] Suhrawardy's culpability in the riots has now become a tradition. What one misses, however, in this blame-game is that the Great Calcutta Killing cannot be explained away by Suhrawardy's personal ambitions or failures. It has to be located within a long-term culmination of progressive breakdown in inter-community relations. The failure of negotiations between the League and the Congress and its reasons, as described above, show the extent to which communal fractures had become unbridgeable in the domain of high politics. But this was only symptomatic of a deeper, more everyday form of inter-community hostility, which came to the forefront on the streets.

The importance of the Great Calcutta Killing lay in the intensification of Hindu-Muslim hostility, already been in evidence for a long time. Its aftermath witnessed a continuation of this trend, but in highly magnified proportions.

[69] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided.*
[70] Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal.*

Fear, Rumour, and Propaganda in the Aftermath of the Great Calcutta Killing

The Great Calcutta Killing inaugurated a regime of fear, propelled by unremitting rumour and propaganda. This signified a deep crisis of state authority, and a loss of public faith in the institutions of governance.

Ms Meyer, a European resident of Calcutta, captured the widespread sense of trauma in the aftermath of the Killing. Writing to an acquaintance in Paris on 30 August 1946, she described how the curfew imposed on 17 August still remained in force, how everyone shut themselves up in their homes by nine in the evening, and how the rampant looting of shops went on after nightfall. The 'whites' were safe as long as the British and their army remained, 'but when they move out, we must too I think…' 'God knows what will happen', she wrote in despair, 'all we can do is hope for the best.'[71]

Such confidence in the government machinery, needless to say, was not shared by very large sections of Indian society. To the Hindu *bhadralok*, the provincial elite that found themselves excluded from political power,[72] the Bengal government run by the League ministry exemplified Muslim tyranny. A resident of Dacca, writing to the Editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, spoke of how distressing it was for him to read about Calcutta Hindus making frantic calls to the police for help during the ominous days of the August Killing. 'This reliance on the machinery of Government', he lamented,

[71] Miss M. Meyer, Calcutta, to Madame G.Weisslitz, Paris, 30 August 1946, K.P.M. No. 01817; S.B. File No. 938 Part I, P.M. (1946).
[72] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided.*

'has developed into a morbid habit'.[73] Now that it was amply clear that Hindus of Bengal could expect no help from either the police or the military during communal riots, he thought there were only two options available for his community. The first was to partition the province and create a 'national home' for the Hindus.[74] But, he argued, 'a whole history and a glorious tradition' militated against this vivisection'.[75] The only choice, he insisted, was 'to galvanize into action a Hindu 'Risorgimento' in the face of a collapsing 'Pax Britannica'.[76] He located the weakness of Bengali Hindus in the absence amongst them of a 'bold and healthy' peasantry, 'the mainstay of a community'.[77] While such 'hardy elements' of Hindu society had been 'uprooted' and alienated from 'contact with the soil', Hindu youth 'dissipate their energies in party conflicts'.[78] He hoped that the Great Calcutta Killing had 'shaken the Hindus out of their sloth and stupor'.[79] He urged his Hindu brethren:

> [I]n this supreme moment let us all unite to awaken those sentiments of religion and chivalry, those virtues of patriotism and valour, which had been so much weakened by the misfortunes of the times, but is essentially necessary to drive back the foul invaders who are threatening to submerge us in a deluge of slavery.[80]

Suspicion of the government machinery and appeal to the traditions of 'Hindu valour' characterized an increasingly influential strand of Hindu communal discourse. The letter quoted above, authored by an ordinary provincial Hindu *bhadralok*, expressed sentiments that were gaining ground at an all-India level. On 25 August 1946,

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[73] S.B. Choudhury, Dacca, to the Editor, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, 2 September 1946, K.P.M. No. 01817; S.B. File No. 938 Part I, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.

days after Calcutta had begun to calm down, the Hindu Mahasabha held a meeting in Delhi 'to consider the situation at Calcutta'.[81] Mahasabha veteran Dr. B.S. Moonje reminded his audience of 'the need of organization and solidarity of the Hindus' and 'rousing martial spirit' so that they could defend themselves.[82] Moonje declared that not only did the Bengal Ministry fail in its duties, the Ministers themselves 'played a disgraceful part of abettor and instigator of murder, arson and looting in an organized manner'.[83] Swami Satyanand, the Founder President of the Hindu Mission of Calcutta, who chaired the meeting, called for Bengal's administration to be handed over to 'an impartial agency free from the influence of the Muslim League', and for the establishment of a Commission of Judicial Inquiry into the Calcutta Riots.[84] A Commission of Inquiry was eventually set up, but it did precious little to restore public faith in the state machinery.[85]

[81] Secret Source Report, 25 August 1946, ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Once the Bengal government set up the Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Inquiry, there was widespread propaganda insisting that the Commission would never be able to function independently. The Calcutta Citizens' Defence Committee, set up by leaders of both the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, claimed that the independence of the Commission was compromised from the beginning because the British government, which had set it up in the first place, would never allow the inquiry to go against the Muslim League. This was because the British government wanted the Muslim League to remain in power in Bengal. See 'Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha – Calcutta Riots', 25 September 1946, K.P.M. No. 01817; S.B. File No. 938 Part I, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP. This has been discussed later in the chapter. Press propaganda also claimed that the Bengal administration was trying to conceal information from the Commission and interfering with its proceedings. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* claimed that senior officers of the Calcutta Police were taking their juniors to task for revealing information about the functioning of the police force during the August Killing. See *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 7 March 1947. The report titled 'Police Official's Dilemma – Calcutta Riots Enquiry: Report of Penalization for Giving Evidence' has been filed by the Special Branch in K.P.M. No. 01823/05, S.B. File No. 938 (IV), P.M. (1947), SBR, CP. This issue has been discussed in the next chapter.

For its part, Calcutta was in the grip of rumours about Muslims preparing for 'another attack' upon the Hindus.[86] These were fuelled by reports of low-key incidents of stabbing, acid-throwing and arson that poured in from different parts of the city. Such incidents stirred fresh waves of panic, which cracked the façade of public order. A few cases of stabbing in the night of 4 September 1946, for example, seemed to plunge the city once again into chaos. An intelligence agent declared the situation to be 'explosive'; and thought the atmosphere was worse than that which prevailed on 15 August 1946, the day before the Great Calcutta Killing.[87] On the morning of 5 September 1946, Hindu and Muslim mobs confronted each other across Calcutta. Rajabazar, in the north of the city, was the theatre of an open battle between groups divided along communal lines. According to the police, this violence was prompted by rumours of stabbings elsewhere in the city.[88]

The fear that engulfed Calcutta was evident from frequent calls to police stations about attacks that turned out to be false. The slightest noise in the streets rang alarm bells and prompted frantic calls for help.[89] The routine of daily life broke down. Rumours of stabbing and stone-throwing brought the transport services to a standstill.[90] Although tram services on certain routes continued to operate under military or police protection, shops remained closed and offices had to be shut for lack of attendance.[91] D.R. Hardwick, the Commissioner of Police, issued a circular describing 'positive

[86] For a detailed discussion in how rumour propels communal violence, see Anjan Ghosh, 'Partial Truths: Rumour and Communal Violence in South Asia, 1946-92', PhD Thesis, University of Michigan, 1998.
[87] Extract from daily report on the political situation in Bengal dated 5 September 1946: Calcutta Riots, K.P.M. No. 01817; S.B. File No. 938 Part I, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[88] Confidential diary entry from Inspector D. Dutt of S.B., Calcutta, 5 September 1946, ibid.
[89] Confidential diary entry from S.I. H.M. Bhattacharya, 6 September 1946, ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] 'Panic on 5.9.46 in Calcutta', 6 September 1946, ibid.

actions' required of the police force in order to prevent a further conflagration.[92] He advised Inspectors, Sub-Inspectors and Sergeants that they must not hesitate to open fire and make indiscriminate arrests 'whenever possible'. Wherever they saw 'assemblies' – 'groups of people brought together for a common purpose, such as a procession or a knot of people standing in the street talking together' – they should arrest as many as they could. 'If they are innocent', the Commissioner advised, 'they will be let off in Court'.[93] The police must not, he ordered, enter into a discussion with the people they arrested: 'let them do the discussion with the Magistrate'.[94] Such directions from the very apex of the police establishment speak volumes about a panic-stricken civil administration. Once these orders were put into practice, police action held city life to ransom quite as much as communal tensions did.

Rumours of communal assaults, more than anything else, fuelled administrative panic. Among the prime vehicles of rumours were leaflets, pamphlets, posters and handbills that surreptitiously circulated, exchanged hands and appeared in public spaces without warning. As violence erupted afresh on 5 September 1946, a Bengali manuscript poster created considerable turmoil in north Calcutta. It urged Hindus to take a solemn vow 'to retaliate the inhuman murder of their mothers and sisters' by boycotting Muslims 'in every possible way'.[95] No soon than the spurt of stabbings came under some control that fresh rumours emerged in circulation. These spoke of Muslims planning attacks on 9 September 1946 following the League's Council of

[92] 'Orders for Inspectors and Sergeants' from D.R. Hardwick, Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, 6 September 1946, ibid.
[93] Ibid. For a discussion on extra-judicial methods of punishment that the colonial state routinely employed, see Taylor C. Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India*, London; New York: Routledge, 2010.
[94] 'Orders for Inspectors and Sergeants' from D.R. Hardwick, Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, 6 September 1946, K.P.M. No. 01817; S.B. File No. 938 Part I, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[95] S.B. Notes, 5 September 1946, ibid.

Action meeting.[96] One leaflet spoke of how Muslims had decided to attack southern parts of Calcutta during the afternoon when young Hindu men would be away from their homes at work and Hindu residential areas (that is, women and children) would be defenceless.[97] Similar rumours were afloat even in the Pataldanga Street and Mirzapore areas of north Calcutta.[98] Panic-stricken Hindu merchants and shop-owners in the business quarters decided to shut down their shops and offices on that day, and advised the smaller establishments in the area to do the same.[99]

Sometimes leaflets contained rumours of other leaflets. One such leaflet entitled *Shabdhan* ('Beware') referred to leaflets allegedly distributed from the Nakhoda Mosque urging League *goondas* to attack Hindu localities on 9 September 1946 from 11 am to 4 pm. With Hindu men gone off to work, the alleged leaflet suggested, this was a good time to massacre Hindu women and children. Then it apparently instructed *goondas* to shift their target to the business quarters so that Hindu men were caught unawares on their way home from work.[100] Another leaflet found pasted at one of the city's busy crossings contained similar references to leaflets being distributed from the Nakhoda Mosque. It added that the leaflet had been distributed at the express wish of Suhrawardy, the Premier of Bengal; he was now in agreement with Jinnah, it said, who had declared that those Muslims who refrained from killing 'Congress Hindus' would be declared *kafirs*.[101] No handbill or leaflet of the kind was found by the police when they searched the Nakhoda Mosque. But the rumour did, nonetheless, cause

[96] 'Calcutta Riots', 9 September 1946, ibid.
[97] Deputy Central Intelligence Officer, Calcutta, Home Department, Government of India to Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Branch, Calcutta, 7 September 1946, ibid.
[98] Confidential diary entry from A.S.I. Pariman Bhusan Roy, 7 September 1946, ibid.
[99] Confidential diary entry from Inspector D. Dutt, 7 September 1946, ibid.
[100] 'Bengali Leaflet: *Shabdhan*', 9 September 1946, ibid.
[101] 'Calcutta Riots', 11 September 1946.

panic.[102] Neither could the police afford to take it lightly. The Special Branch made arrangements to keep a watch on the Mosque on 9 September, for even if it was just a rumour, 'the public' seemed extremely 'jittery'.[103] Not much happened on that day, except for a brief commotion around the Mosque area because of rumours of Hindus stabbing Muslims in adjacent localities. Police watchers reported how, all of a sudden, shop-owners started pulling down shutters, Muslim men quickly got off trams and started running in all directions. Things calmed down after a few hours once the rumours appeared to be false.[104]

When 9 September 1946 did not witness any concerted Muslim attack upon Hindus, new posters and handbills announced a new date. These declared that the Muslims were preparing to attack on 12 September instead, when the Opposition in the Bengal Legislature had decided to table a 'no confidence motion' against Suhrawardy's ministry.[105] When even this proved incorrect, yet another leaflet emerged, this time issued by one Randhir Singh who styled himself as 'Commander-in-Chief of the Hindu Nation'.[106] It declared that just before the Great Calcutta Killing, the Bengal Government had issued three hundred licences of fire-arms to the Muslims of Calcutta. They were in possession of more than three thousand rifles, revolvers, guns as well as a few machine guns and hand bombs. In case the Bengal Ministry fell on account of the motion, Muslims would immediately launch an attack on Hindus. However, in the event the Ministry continued in office, they would wait until

[102] Ibid.
[103] Report to the Commissioner of Police, 9 September 1946, ibid.
[104] 'Secret watch duty at Nakhoda Mosque, Zakaria Street and locality in connection with the communal disturbance and circulation of unauthorized Bengali Leaflet on 9.9.46', Submitted by S. Ahsan, S.I., S.B., 9 September 1946.
[105] Poster entitled 'Beware of Muslims', 11 September 1946, ibid.
[106] 'Communal Situation in Calcutta', 19 September 1946, ibid.

the situation became normal. This would enable them to strike at a time when their opponents were complacent. Like a military commander, the author of the leaflet laid out the exact routes the Muslims would take to ensure the annihilation of their foes. It argued that the Muslims had chalked out a fool-proof plan of dividing Hindu localities into small segments so that they could be easily isolated and surrounded by small armed mobs. The leaders of the Muslim League, it further claimed, had approved of the plan in their meeting on 27 August 1946.[107]

This constant flow of rumour, sometimes embedded in mysterious pamphlets, maintained communal tension in the city at fever pitch. Hindu fears of Muslim attacks were reinforced by stray cases of assaults, stabbings and setting fire to houses evacuated by Hindus in Muslim localities during the days of the Killing.[108] Some Hindu families who had temporarily moved out of Muslim-majority areas to weather the storm now tended to lose hope of ever returning home.[109] These were, of course, amply reciprocated in Hindu dominated areas where Muslim families found it impossible to live any longer and decided to move to areas with greater concentration of Muslims. These small local migrations surely started the process of communal ghettoization that crystallized in the years after partition,[110] reflected in the division of the city space into more communally homogeneous areas.

[107] Ibid.
[108] See, 'Confidential Diary', 11 September 1946, Ibid; Confidential diary entry from S.I. K.N. Ghosh, S.B., Calcutta, 13 September 1946 and 18 September 1946, ibid.
[109] Confidential diary entry from Mr. A.G. Khan of S.B., Calcutta, 12 October 1946, ibid.
[110] See Joya Chatterji, 'Of graveyards and ghettos, Muslims in West Bengal, 1947-67' in Mushirul Hasan, and Asim Roy (eds.), *Living Together Separately: Cultural India in History and Politics*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.

By the autumn of 1946, stray cases of assault and stabbing had become a part of everyday life in Calcutta. This was also the time when Hindu religious festivities reached their peak in the city. The blurring of religious group performance and communal rivalry made tensions more intense around religious festivals.[111] A leaflet doing the rounds in Hindu neighbourhoods of south Calcutta towards the end of October 1946 accused Muslim 'beasts' licking the boots of British officials and abusing the powers of government to murder the 'non-violent minority Hindus… in a cowardly fashion'.[112] 'The outraged mothers and sisters must be avenged. The souls of the dead Hindu brethren remain unsatiated', it stridently insisted.[113] The leaflet urged Hindu young men to sacrifice Muslims at the altar of the deity during Kali Puja instead of buffaloes: 'The dark Diwali should be coloured with the blood of the Pakistani Muslims.'[114]

Just as propaganda and rumour fuelled fears among Hindus of an impending attack by Muslims, similar sentiments kept stoking Muslim animosity against Hindus. Policemen spoke of a deep sense among Muslims of being wronged by Hindus. They offered an account of Direct Action Day in which the Muslims were victims rather than aggressors. Contrary to Hindu propaganda, they claimed that Hindus and their leaders were responsible for the Great Calcutta Killing. All that Muslims had wanted was to stage an 'unprecedented demonstration' on Direct Action Day.[115] Muslim

[111] For an account of how religious performances in public arenas slowly fed into communal ideology, see Sandria B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
[112] Report of Central Intelligence Officer to the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Branch, Calcutta, K.P.M. No. 01818/05; S.B. File No. 938 Part II, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] 'Miscellaneous – Calcutta Riots', 5 September 1946, K.P.M. No. 01817; S.B. File No. 938 Part I, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP. Also see 'Calcutta Riots', 7 September 1946, ibid.

leaders had called upon everyone in Calcutta to observe a strike. Muslims had joined Hindus on numerous protests and demonstrations in the past and expected the latter to reciprocate. However, Hindus were keen to sabotage the demonstration. On finding Hindu shops open, Muslims attempted to persuade the shopkeepers to refrain from opposing the strike. But Hindus, they alleged, were bent on making trouble and took every opportunity to assault them. In many parts of Calcutta, they banded together in large crowds to attack Muslims. Stones, soda bottles and hot water were thrown on peaceful Muslim processions; unarmed Muslims were mercilessly butchered; several mosques were desecrated. Even 'Nationalist Muslims', with their 'backbones' practically broken by the recent floor-crossing of Fazlul Huq, deeply resented such atrocities.[116] Except for a microscopic minority (that included Syed Nausher Ali and Humayun Kabir), Muslim leaders of all persuasions, police reports claimed, had joined hands with the Muslim League to help victims of their community 'in every possible way'.[117] According to the report, Muslims claimed that the Bengal Government had called a strike on 16 August 1946 to ensure that there were no communal clashes. Had the Suhrawardy Ministry wanted to create trouble, it would not have asked ordinary Muslims to attend the meeting at the Ochterlony Monument 'leaving their women and children at the mercy of the Hindus'.[118] In fact, some had gone to the meeting with small children, which they would not have done had they planned to start the killings.[119] All this was evidence, in the opinion of Muslims, that falsified the accusation that it was the Muslims who planned the riot. Yet after the Killing, Muslims faced constant vilification. Hindu leaders prepared to table no-confidence mo-

[116] 'Miscellaneous – Calcutta Riots', 5 September 1946, ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] 'Calcutta Riots', 7 September 1946, ibid.
[119] Ibid.

tions against the League ministry in the Assembly as well as against the Mayor in the Calcutta Corporation.[120] Despite being aware that such actions were not likely to be successful, opposition leaders persisted with these strategies merely to defame Muslims. Such propaganda was designed to present Muslims as aggressors and Hindus as victims. The League ministry, instead of coming to their rescue, was trying to appease Hindus. Muslims found themselves at the receiving end of police highhandedness and abuse. While they were harassed with constant house searches and arbitrary arrests, the police were reluctant to take action against 'Hindu hooligans and looters'.[121] One incident was said to have particularly incensed the 'Muslim community of Calcutta'; sometime towards the end of September 1946, armed police or the army (the Special Branch was unsure which) had fired tear gas at the Nakhoda Mosque while about eight hundred devotees congregated for prayer. Not only did this infuriate the assembled worshippers, the screen of the mosque had caught fire, although it was extinguished soon thereafter.[122] The Muslims therefore felt betrayed not only by the Hindus but also by their own leaders who controlled the provincial administration.

Muslims were also embittered by the constant flow of leaflets, pamphlets, handbills and posters issued by Hindu provocateurs blaming Muslims of planning fresh attacks on Hindus.[123] The Calcutta District Muslim League complained to the police on several occasions, warning that circulation of such propaganda could lead to sud-

[120] 'Miscellaneous: Communal Situation in Calcutta', 18 September 1946, ibid.
[121] 'Miscellaneous: Calcutta Riots', 5 September 1946, ibid.
[122] See 'Miscellaneous: Communal Situation', 26 September 1946, ibid. Also, Confidential diary entry from A.G. Khan of S.B., Calcutta, 3 October 1946, K.P.M. No. 01487/05; S.B. File No. 506 IV, P.M. (1946).
[123] 'Miscellaneous – Communal Situation in Calcutta', 19 September 1946, ibid. Also in K.P.M. No. 01487/05, S.B. File No. 506 IV, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.

den escalations of tension,[124] precipitating small-scale violence on numerous occasions. Not a day passed without reports of stabbings and attacks on helpless victims.[125] Just as Hindu festivals generated apprehensions among Hindus about Muslim attacks, Muslim festivals also produced anxieties about Hindu attacks. That these fears were not wholly unfounded were proved by several attacks on Muharram processions in December 1946.[126] There were also rumours of stabbings and attacks circulating in Muslim-dominated localities. Rumours of atrocities on Muslims prompted feelings of revenge against Hindus, even when these were proved to be false. One Inspector toured Muslim neighbourhoods in north Calcutta and concluded that violence could break out anytime because of rumours of Hindus planning to attack them.[127] Another police informer spoke of 'gossip' freely shared in restaurants and tea shops at Wellesley and Park Circus areas about what the next moves of the Hindus were going to be.[128] Despite efforts of League leaders and various peace committees, anti-Hindu rumours remained pervasive in Muslim localities.[129] Sudden escalations of tension resulted from wild rumours of Jinnah being arrested[130] or shot,[131] just as there were rumours among Hindus of a Muslim conspiracy to kill Nehru.[132] Such rumours

[124] Secretary, Calcutta District Muslim League to Commissioner of Police, 8 September 1946, K.P.M. No. 01817; S.B. File No. 938 Part I, P.M. (1946).
[125] See daily records of communal clashes in K.P.M. No. 01818/05, S.B. File No. 938 Part II, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[126] See police reports on attacks on Muharram processions on 2 December 1946 and 6 December 1946, ibid.
[127] Confidential diary entry by A.G. Khan of S.B., Calcutta, 19 September 1946, K.P.M. No. 01817; S.B. File No. 938 Part I, P.M. (1946); 'Miscellaneous: Communal Situation', 26 September 1946, ibid.
[128] 'Extract from a secret agent's report', 7 October 1946, K.P.M. No. 01487/05, S.B. File No. 506 IV, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[129] Undated report (perhaps towards the end of September 1946), K.P.M. No. 01817; S.B. File No. 938 Part I, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[130] 'Miscellaneous: Communal Situation and tension in Calcutta', 10 September 1946, Ibid.
[131] 'Miscellaneous: Communal Situation in Calcutta', 20 September 1946, ibid.
[132] 'Students: Burrabazar Students' Congress', 23 September 1946, ibid.

among Hindus and Muslims, each mirroring the other, kept communal tempers on both sides red hot.

After the outbreak of communal violence in Noakhali, where Muslim peasants were reported to have massacred Hindu landlords,[133] even newspapers published reports that the Muslims claimed were nothing but rumours.[134] Reports of forced conversions of Hindus to Islam led to serious clashes in Calcutta. A Special Branch officer reported that various Hindu organizations had set up their camps at the Sealdah railway station in order to provide relief to Hindu refugees fleeing communal violence in Noakhali and Tipperah. The situation, in his view, was 'fraught with considerable danger', as volunteers of such organizations pounced on anyone getting off from trains from eastern Bengal.[135] Scuffles routinely broke out between passengers and these volunteers, especially when they found women in *burkhas* accompanying Muslim men. In such cases, these volunteers harassed the passengers and interrogated them for hours to determine whether they, especially the women, were victims of forced conversion to Islam. As expected, Muslim volunteers also set up rival camps to rescue Muslim passengers from harassment, and this often resulted in an uproar. On one such occasion, a riot seemed imminent when an armed policeman, fearing that the situation was going out of control, fired two rounds killing one and injuring another two people.[136]

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[133] For Noakhali riots, see Rakesh Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine to Noakhali, 1943-47*, New Delhi, London: Sage, 2005; Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991; Anwesha Roy, 'Making Riots, Making Peace: Communalism, Communal Riots and Anti-Communal Resistance in Bengal, 1941-47', PhD Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2015.
[134] S.B. Report, undated but probably on 30 or 31 October 1946, K.P.M. No. 01487/05, S.B. File No. 506 IV, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[135] 'Miscellaneous – Communal Situation in Calcutta', 23 October 1946, ibid.
[136] Ibid.

The rumours – whose origins remain mysterious – were accompanied by relentless propaganda against the partiality and communal bias of the police. A Bengali news-paper, *Bharat*, emerged as the flag-bearer of this crusade.[137] Naming (and shaming) specific police officers, *Bharat* described how they encouraged the burning of Hindu houses and illegal arrests of Bengali *bhadraloks*. In one article, it claimed that Muslim *goondas* were systematically burning down Hindu houses in Muslim-dominated areas of central and north Calcutta, such as Park Circus, Beniapukur and Manicktala, so that the Hindu families who had run away from their homes could not return.[138] Not only were the police turning a blind eye to such criminal acts, the paper claimed, they were actively encouraging arson by influencing the personnel of local fire stations. The government, it alleged, had transferred efficient firemen posted at these stations over-night and replaced them with 'Pakistani soldiers'.[139] What exactly is implied by this cryptic expression is difficult to ascertain, but it is likely that *Bharat* was complaining about the replacement of existing and retiring personnel of these stations with Muslim firemen. Furthermore, it accused the Commissioner of Police, 'the red-faced Pakistani General Hardwick *Saheb*' of orchestrating these changes.[140] In another article *Bharat* accused the Officer-in-Charge of Tollygunje Police Station of protecting Muslim *badmashes* with the help of his obese Sergeant and his Inspector Usuf.[141] This evil duo, *Bharat* claimed, had arrested more than a hundred innocent Hindu *bhadralok* without a shred of evidence against them so as to prove their allegiance to the Muslim

[137] Ibid. See the large collection of newspaper cuttings from *Bharat*.
[138] *Bharat*, 16 November 1946.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] *Bharat*, 6 November 1946.

League. However, it assured its readers that such lawlessness had finally been stopped with the intervention of the Hindu Assistant Commissioner Robin Gupta.[142] In another article, *Bharat* charged the Officer-in-Charge of the Beniapukur Police Station, Allauddin, with encouraging miscreants to burn down Hindu houses and shops. The situation had deteriorated so much, it claimed, that the American news agency, *Associated Press*, had been forced to send out reports to international media informing the world of police atrocities in Calcutta.[143]

Other popular Bengali newspapers kept up the refrain. They too accused Muslim police officers of partiality, although in more measured tones. In sensational cases, many such papers desisted from publishing the exact police station or the names of police officers involved. *Dainik Basumati*, for example, reported a case of *goondas* breaking into a *thana* and releasing the arrested members of their gang.[144] The Muslim Officer-in-Charge allegedly entered into negotiation with the miscreants and persuaded them to turn the offender back into police custody. Appalled by this incident, the paper demanded the immediate transfer of the Officer-in-Charge. It accused the latter of communal bias, as he had reportedly prevented the Hindu constables and other officers of his *thana* from firing on *goondas*. These daily reports, and the relentless propaganda around stabbing, assault and arson under the active connivance of an allegedly 'communalized' police force, heightened the paranoia of Calcutta Hindus against the Muslim League-dominated provincial administration, and Muslims in general. Such attitudes, images and assumptions have found expression in Bengali

[142] Ibid.
[143] *Bharat*, 9 November 1946.
[144] *Dainik Basumati*, 27 October 1946.

literature, the detective novel *Adim Ripu* by Saradindu Bandyopadhaya being only the most famous.[145]

This atmosphere – dense with communal propaganda – precipitated a communal consolidation that sometimes cut across party-political affiliations. To an extent, this consolidation was prompted by the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the August Riots in Calcutta towards the end of September 1946.[146] Setting aside party affiliations and ideological differences, political leaders joined hands to present the case of their respective communities. On the one hand, it contributed to a further blurring of the differences between the Bengal Congress and the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha. On the other, Muslim leaders who had hitherto maintained distance from the Bengal Muslim League, gravitated towards it in a bid to present themselves as representatives of the embattled community, cruelly wronged by its Other.

Towards the end of September 1946, the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha leaders had come together to form the Calcutta Citizen's Defence Committee. Chaired by Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, it counted amongst its members the 'who's who' of Bengal politics – Surendra Mohan Ghosh, Kiran Sankar Roy, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Bidhan Chandra Roy, Nirmal Chandra Chatterjee – and included within its ranks capitalists of the stature of the Birlas.[147] What unified capitalists, Congressmen and Mahasabhaites, undoubtedly, was that they were all Hindus. Spearheaded by the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha, the Committee condemned the Suhrawardy government for the 'ghastly

[145] Saradindu Bandyopadhyay, 'Adim Ripu' in Pratulchandra Gupta (ed.), *Saradindu Omnibus*, vol. II, Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1980. See Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, pp. 227-259.
[146] See SRPSB for the first half of September 1946, second half of September 1946 and first half of October 1946, L/PJ/5/153, 1946, IOR.
[147] 'Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha – Calcutta Riots', 25 September 1946, K.P.M. No. 01817; S.B. File No. 938 Part I, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.

carnage' and proclaimed the innocence of the Hindus.[148] The Mahasabha insisted that it had appealed to the Hindus to remain calm, peaceful and non-provocative, even though it had directed its Ward Presidents and Secretaries to be vigilant and resist coercion of 'miscreants'.[149] It was only after disturbances broke out on the Direct Action Day that Mahasabha leaders organized defence parties 'to save the lives and property of the Hindus'.[150] But it held that 'without the active help of the British Governor, British Chief Secretary, British Police and the British troops', the Suhrawardy government could not possibly have orchestrated the 'Nadirshahi mass butchery in the heart of Calcutta'.[151] The Calcutta Citizen's Defence Committee called for an immediate transfer of the administrative machinery to the Congress so that British officials could not join hands with 'League *goondas*' and repeat the 'bloodbath' in the city.[152] It also voiced concerns that the Inquiry Commission would not act impartially because of the 'deep-rooted conspiracy' of the British Government to keep the League in power in Bengal. It nevertheless called upon all individuals and organizations to give evidence before the Committee to 'strengthen the suspicion that a conspiracy between the British bureaucrats and the Leaguers did exist'. The Mahasabha also decided to publish the speeches of League leaders and editorial comments of League organs with a foreword by Syama Prasad Mookerjee to mobilize public opinion. Apart from deposing before the Commission, the Citizen's Defence Committee also took up the cases of 'respectable Hindus' who had been victims of 'indiscriminate arrests' up-

[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid. 'Nadirshahi' refers to the proverbial plunders of Nader Shah, the eighteenth century Shah of Persia who invaded India in the last days of the Mughal Empire and ransacked Delhi.
[152] Ibid.

on false allegations by 'Muslim complainants instigated to give false evidence by Muslim Leaguers'.[153]

Bengal Muslim politics saw similar developments in the days after the Calcutta Killing. It witnessed the further consolidation of the Muslim League, uniting various factions within it – if only briefly and tenuously – on an anti-Hindu programme. The elections to the Bengal legislatures earlier in the year had, as mentioned above, given the League an overwhelming mandate in favour of the Muslim League. Non-League Muslim leaders had been severely marginalized. Even the Krishak Praja Party had suffered shocking reverses. Leading Praja leaders including Syed Naushar Ali, the Speaker of the previous Bengal Legislative Assembly, were crushingly defeated at the hands of Muslim League candidates.[154] Only the indomitable Fazlul Huq, who contested from two constituencies, won both seats.[155]

Yet, after the Calcutta Riots, even Huq decided to cross over to the League. This rendered the few remaining non-League Muslim legislators virtually impotent. This was not the first time that Fazlul Huq changed his political affiliation, of course. However, according to the Bengal Governor, this time his decision was influenced by the fate of non-League political leaders during the Killing. In those ominous times, Syed Nausher Ali, for example, had to take shelter in a police station for days to 'avoid massacre by the League hooligans'.[156] His floor-crossing, along with that of three other non-League Muslim legislators, further buttressed the Ministry's position

[153] Ibid.
[154] SRPSB, second half of March 1946, L/PJ/5/153, 1946, IOR.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Burrows to Wavell, 6 September 1946, ibid.

in the Assembly. If Suhrawardy could hold onto the support of five Independent Scheduled Caste members who had supported his Ministry until this point, the Muslim League could now command an absolute majority in the Assembly with 127 supporters (including the Speaker) in a House of 250 members.[157]

Outside the legislature, the Muslim League was also gaining ground among the Khaksars, despite the fact that the all-India Khaksar leadership was at loggerheads with Jinnah.[158] Hindu vigilantes had not spared Khaksars during the August Killing. Khaksar leaders in Calcutta begged Allama Mashraqi, their all-India leader, to join the League after Jinnah's call for all Muslims to unite under the League banner.[159] Mashraqi extended a conditional offer to Jinnah, declaring that the Khakrars would be willing to join the League only if he worked with Gandhi 'to achieve the independence of India and Pakistan'. However, their Bengal leadership insisted that this was an unreasonable demand, and decided to work with the League in the province without formally joining the party.[160] Thus, both within and outside the Assembly, the Muslim League successfully built up a uniquely wide base of support, drawing close to it those who had previously remained aloof.

The factional divides within the Bengal League remained as sharp as ever, yet when it came to the defence of 'Muslim interests', all sections of the party stood unit-

[157] Ibid.
[158] For details of the Khaksar movement and its leader, Allama Mashraqi, see Hira Lal Seth, *The Khaksar Movement and Its Leader Allama Mashraqi*, Delhi: Discover Publishing House, 1985; Amalendu De, *History of the Khaksar Movement in India, 1931-1947,* Kolktata: Parul Prakashani, 2009.
[159] 'Muslim Affairs – Khaksar Association', 12 September 1946, 6 September 1946, K.P.M. No. 01817, S.B. File No. 938 Part I, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[160] 'Muslim Affairs – Khaksar Association and Communal Disturbances in Calcutta', 30 October 1946, ibid.

ed. Ongoing rivalries were now articulated through attacks on the ministry for not doing enough to safeguard and promote the interests of the Muslim community. The assumption, of course, was that all Muslims had the same interests, which were distinct from those of non-Muslims.

Thus, a paradoxical posturing characterized League politics in the months after the Killings. On the one hand, all Muslim leaders (Leaguers as well as those outside it) joined the chorus claiming a Hindu conspiracy against Muslims, and the Muslim League ministry. On the other hand, the Suhrawardy ministry was subjected to severe criticism by many Muslim leaders, who attacked it for betraying the 'Muslim cause'.

The most remarkable expression of this paradox was the formation of a Central Relief and Defence Committee in early September 1946 by League leaders opposed to the ministry.[161] In fact, the Calcutta Citizen's Defence Committee – constituted later by a Congress-Mahasabha alliance, as discussed above – replicated the model pioneered by Suhrawardy's rivals within his own party. They included almost all prominent Leaguers outside the ruling faction, including Fazlul Huq, Nazimuddin, Azizul Huq and Ispahani. The Committee accused the Suhrawardy administration of harassing Muslims 'even for bonafide and honest possession of articles', making illegal arrests and conducting indiscriminate house searches.[162] It resolved to arrange the legal defence of Muslims arrested in connection with communal riots, and to record the statements of all Muslim men and women who had been targets of Hindu and Sikh violence. With the financial support of most prominent Muslim merchants of Calcut-

[161] 'Muslim Affairs – Muslim League – Calcutta Riots', 6 September 1946, ibid.
[162] Ibid.

ta, the Committee raised about one hundred and fifty thousand rupees within days of its formation, and placed the funds in Ispahani's custody.[163] Besides legal defence, it provided relief for Muslim riot victims, especially those who had been orphaned or widowed. Just as Congress and Mahasabha had come together to defend 'Hindu interests' against the alleged onslaught of the Muslim ministry, the Committee under Suhrawardy's party rivals sharpened their criticism, threatening to take legal action against the provincial government for continuing to harass Muslims of the city.[164] Yet when it came to the no-confidence motion tabled in the Assembly by the Opposition in mid-September 1946, all Muslim legislators, irrespective of factional divides, stood united behind the ministry. Internal rivalries were articulated through intrigues within the party to force Suhrawardy to reshuffle his Cabinet, so that his ambitious rivals could share the resources and powers of office.[165]

Newspapers emerged as another vehicle of public criticism of Suhrawardy's government. Paradoxically, these newspapers often had declared Muslim League leanings. Yet they carried propaganda alleging discrimination against Muslims by the provincial government. *Azad,* for example, accused Suhrawardy of deliberately refusing to depute Muslim police officers to assist in preparing the Police Commissioner's report on the August riots.[166] It implied that Suhrawardy was deliberately trying to tone down the culpability of the Hindus in the police version of the Killing. It further alleged that a Muslim police officer in north Calcutta was transferred merely because

[163] 'Muslim Affairs – Muslim League – Calcutta Riots', 10 September 1946, ibid.
[164] 'Review of Azad India', 31 October 1946, K.P.M. No. 01818/05, S.B. File No. 938 Part II, P.M. (1946).
[165] 'Muslim Affairs – Muslim League', 14 September 1946, K.P.M. No. 01817; S.B. File No. 938 Part I, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[166] *Azad*, 23 September 1946.

he had conducted searches in Hindu localities.[167] *Rozana Hind* also accused the ministry of conducting 'unnecessary searches', provoking deep and understandable resentment among 'Muslims of Calcutta'.[168] It recounted a story of how a Hindu Inspector of a *thana* forcibly entered Muslim households with 'Bhojpuri Constables' on the plea of making searches. Following an incident in which someone had thrown an acid bulb on a bus, *Rozana Hind* accused the Hindu Inspector of rescuing only the Hindu victim and using this excuse to arrest many Muslim men and abuse 'Muslim *pardanashin* women in filthy language'.[169] Those arrested were finally released on the insistence of the Hindu victim that he did not know whether the culprit was a Hindu or a Muslim.[170] These newspapers propagated the idea that despite the League being at the helm of affairs in Bengal, ministers acted in ways detrimental to their own constituency and the Muslim community.

Newspapers were themselves not immune from public wrath. Anonymous letters, for example, threatened *The Statesman* and its staff with dire consequences for its anti-Muslim League stance. One such letter, signed by one 'Jehadi', warned its Editor: 'You will do well to keep your mouth shut… if you do not stop writing against us we have decided to burn your office completely and butcher you and the white women.'[171] The writer bragged that there would be no one to save them 'as Police is ours'. It demanded that *The Statesman* should ask its 'friends in the Assembly' (presumably indicating the European members) to vote for the Ministry, or else they would be

[167] Ibid.
[168] *Rozana Hind*, 1 November 1946.
[169] *Rozana Hind*, 23 October 1946.
[170] Ibid.
[171] The letter had reached *The Statesman*'s office on 30 September 1946. See 'Miscellaneous – Calcutta Riots', 17 October 1946, K.P.M. No. 01817; S.B. File No. 938 Part I, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.

doomed.[172] Another letter, which *The Statesman* received about a week later, threatened: 'I am very sorry to say that if you ever, from today onwards, interfere with Muslim matters, or write anything against them, you will be in trouble and *The Statesman* House will be blown up, so you better be careful.'[173] This writer described himself as 'Your friendly advisor' and signed off with 'Muslim *Zindabad*'.[174]

That both these letters were written in English shows that these were not the work of illiterate 'hooligans'. Educated middle-class consumers of 'English' news were involved in the controversies about newspapers and their biased reportage.

An Intelligence Officer emphasized this point with some surprise. While passing through the Park Circus tram depot, he reported, he was alarmed by a Muslim crowd involved in a heated altercation with a hawker of newspapers. On investigation, he found out that the crowd was insisting that the hawker, also a Muslim, had refrained from selling *Navayug* and *The Statesman*, because both these papers had adopted an 'anti-Muslim' stance. The officer noted, with surprise, that the people in the crowd 'seemed to be decent looking and literate'.[175] This vignette says as much about police stereotypes as it does about communalism in this area.

But there were also instances of physical intimidation of newspaper staff that, the police believed, were being carried out by 'hooligans', probably under the instigation of the educated middle-class readers of newspapers. On 1 November 1946, a peon

[172] Ibid.
[173] This letter had reached *The Statesman*'s office on 8 October 1946. See 'Miscellaneous – Calcutta Riots', 19 October 1946.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Copy of an IB Report dated 7 September 1946, ibid.

working with *The Statesman* was stabbed on Grant Street. The reporting policeman remarked, with some concern, that this was the third time since the August Killing that peons employed by *The Statesman* had been attacked.[176] Self-appointed guardians of community interests, it seems, were keen to enforce censorship, either by threatening newspaper offices, their lower staff or even their vendors.

Communal Animosity and Everyday Economic Dislocation

One of the biggest consequences of the Great Calcutta Killing on the life of the city was the straining of everyday economic relations between Hindus and Muslims. Calcutta's growing importance as a centre for trade and commerce had attracted Muslim migrants from all parts of India since the eighteenth century. It had attracted merchants from northern and western India, most of whom were Urdu speakers. The Cutchi Memons were among the wealthiest mercantile groups, who had migrated from Kathiawar in the eighteenth century, and they dominated the trade in hide as well as exports and imports of indigo and rice. Others included Pathan merchants who mostly dealt in the leather trade and dominated informal credit networks, Iranian merchants engaged in exports and imports and other traders from Western India participated in a variety of trades.[177] Apart from merchants, there were the aristocratic Muslim families from Awadh and Mysore, as well as the displaced native Muslim aristocracies who had worked in the army and administration of royal courts of Bengal.[178]

[176] 'Incidents on 1.11.46', K.P.M. No. 01818/05, S.B. File No. 938 Part II, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[177] McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm*, p. 4.
[178] Ibid., p. II.

These aristocrats had brought with them their retinues and servants, who swelled the ranks of the urban proletariat. However, from the late nineteenth century, Calcutta had also begun to attract a large number of poorer Muslim migrants from north India as labourers in the jute mills in its industrial suburbs. But apart from the mills, a large number poured into the city to provide various services and participated in a variety of occupations.[179]

There were substantial Muslim settlements in the heart of town, with large enclaves around the Hogg market – the largest municipal market of the city – as well as clusters around the Nakhoda Mosque and the indigenous commercial area of Burrabazar. The latter area was dominated by Marwari merchants and traders.[180] Muslim labourers, living cheek and jowl with the Marwaris, had developed intimate connections with the latter. Many of them, migrants from Bihar and the Punjab, worked as carters in Burrabazar and provided a variety of services.[181] Clashes and petty squabbles with Hindu rivals in these areas were not uncommon, but Hindus and Muslims did develop close ties of mutual interdependence.[182] These connections, which had woven Hindu and Muslim groups into the economic fabric of Calcutta for at least about a century and a half, began to show signs of strain from the 1920s.[183] But despite growing Hindu-Muslim hostility, these ties remained functional until the 1940s.

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[179] Ibid., p. 4. Also see Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji and Annu Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora: Muslim Migrants in Britain, India and Bangladesh*, London: Routledge, 2013.
[180] McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm*, pp. 5-6.
[181] For a discussion of different groups and their politics in Bengal in the 1920s and the 1930s, see Tanika Sarkar, *Bengal, 1928-1934: The Politics of Protest*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987.
[182] Ibid., p. 6.
[183] McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm*; Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal*; Dutta, *Carving Blocs.*

These bonds tended to break down in the aftermath of the August massacre. By early September 1946, reports of Hindu businesses and shops dismissing their Muslim employees grew more frequent, as did stories of the economic boycott of Muslims.[184] In some *bazaars* of north Calcutta, Hindu shopkeepers drove away Muslim vegetable sellers and butchers.[185] Hindu workers of Muslim firms also feared losing their jobs. The decision by a Muslim firm, Wachel Molla and Sons, to dismiss fifteen Hindu employees, caused consternation. According to a secret police report, the firm planned to sack the remaining Hindu employees after the Durga Puja festival.[186]

Tension was particularly acute in the commercial areas of north and central Calcutta. In Burrabazar, Amratola and Mullickbazar, Muslim carters had a virtual monopoly in the business of transporting goods. Carts were used to navigate the intricate network of narrow lanes and bylanes, moving goods, stocking warehouses, loading and offloading larger vehicles which could not enter these crowded *gullies*. After the riots, the relation between Muslim carters and Hindu merchants, often Marwaris, became acutely strained. The latter began bringing in Hindu carters from 'outside'. Leading Hindu merchants of the area actively canvassed for the ending of all commercial relations with Muslims.[187] This had an immediate and adverse impact on the livelihoods of Muslim carters and cart-owners. They petitioned the Commissioner of Police and the Deputy Commissioner of Northern Division to intervene on their behalf.[188]

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[184] Confidential diary entry of Inspector A.G. Khan of S.B., Calcutta, 5 September 1946, K.P.M. No. 01818/05, S.B. File No. 938 Part II, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP..
[185] Extract from daily report on the political situation in Bengal, 5 September 1946, ibid.
[186] Untitled report, 26 September 1946, ibid.
[187] 'Unrest among the Muslim carters and Cart Chaudhuries in Amratala', undated (but likely to be in late September or early October 1946), ibid.
[188] Ibid.

Alarmist rumours also disrupted economic interdependence between Hindus and Muslims. Calcutta Police found a leaflet in Hindi pasted on a pillar at the junction of Harrison Road and Clive Street. It declared that 'Muslim *Goondas*' were forcing Hindu workshop owners in Muslim-dominated areas to employ local Muslims. These *goondas* allegedly warned that if Hindu owners dared to disobey them, their workshops would be looted and burnt down.[189] The author of the leaflet, Randhir Singh, 'Commander-in-Chief of the Hindu National Guard', advised his 'Hindu brethren' not to be afraid of such threats. They must prepare to defend every Hindu workshop. If Hindu owners thought that they would save their workshops by giving in to Muslim demands, they were mistaken, he argued. This was a Muslim conspiracy to enter the workshops as employees, kill the Hindu owners, and then take over the business, for 'there is little that this deceitful community does not do'.[190] The leaflet concluded thus:

> Die or be destroyed, but never accept defeat. If the property is destroyed, let it go; if lives are lost, let it be so, but do not put a stigma on the prestige of the Hindu nation over and above your losing everything by submitting to the demands of deceitful men.[191]

The Bengal National Chamber of Labour wrote to the Commissioner of Police complaining about these posters urging Hindus to boycott Muslims economically, in every possible way, including handbills which pressed Hindus not to buy *biris* from Muslim *biri* makers and other commodities manufactured by Muslims; not to hire rickshaws, hackneys and taxis driven by Muslims; not to recruit Muslim workers, and to dismiss

[189] 'Miscellaneous: Communal Situation in Calcutta', 20 September 1946, ibid.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.

those already in their employment.[192] Although the investigating officer found no evidence of such posters or handbills, he observed that a *de facto* economic boycott did exist 'on account of the day to day incidents in the city causing fear of life.[193]

Even in those factories where relations between Hindu and Muslim workers remained cordial during the Killing, rumours circulating in its aftermath threatened to bring production to a standstill. On 15 September 1946, the Manager and the Works Superintendent of the Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works reported disruptive rumours at the factory.[194] The whisperers had it that Muslims in neighbouring areas of Phulbagan, Kalabagan and Kankurgachi were planning to attack the factory and kill Hindu workers. Accordingly, 'some outsider Muslims' had asked the Muslim employees of the factory to leave once they received their pay.[195] Makleswar Rahman, a laboratory assistant, overheard this conversation among his colleagues and reported it to his Sectional Head.[196] The Manager told the police that even on Direct Action Day, Makleswar had turned up for work. The family quarters of the factory bordered the eastern banks of a canal. Upon investigation, the police found that Muslim boatmen had easy access to these quarters, and inmates complained about 'strangers' entering their private areas and spreading fear and panic, especially among women.[197]

[192] Secretary, Bengal National Chamber of Labour to the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, 2 October 1946, K.P.M. No. 01487/05, S.B. File No. 506 IV, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Secret report of the Assistant Commissioner of Police, North Suburbs, to the Deputy Commissioner, 15 September 1946, ibid.
[195] Report of investigation by H.M. Bhattacharya, S.B., Calcutta, 26 September 1946, ibid.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.

The factory management realized that police involvement in this case was only likely to heighten suspicion.[198] So they arranged their own mechanisms to counter the 'wild rumours'. They selected twelve trusted workers of the factory – Hindus and Muslims – to cycle around in the adjoining areas and report to the factory. The factory, in its turn, published news bulletins –at 12 noon, 2 pm and 4 pm every day – to supply information to the workers. This, the Manager reported, helped alleviate fears and improved production considerably.[199] This is yet another instance of the precipitous decline in the legitimacy of the state. Factory workers considered intervention of the institutions of the state more troubling than a source of reassurance.

The straining of economic relations between Hindus and Muslims among the Calcutta working classes, made political work among the labouring poor extremely difficult. The Communist Party of India (CPI) had also suffered attacks during the August riots. Muslim mobs had ransacked two of its CPI Communes at Harrison Road and Chittaranjan Avenue. Muslim Communist inmates had tried to prevent the angry crowd, but to no avail. Although the Commune members were eventually rescued, their belongings were looted, and the buildings were vandalized.[200]

In the days after the riots, Muslim CPI members were subjects of slanderous gossip, discrediting them for 'betraying the Muslim cause'.[201] Party work suffered since, due to the communally-charged atmosphere, Hindu party activists could not visit Muslim areas, while Muslim comrades found it impossible to work in Hindu domi-

[198] Confidential diary entry by H.M. Bhattacharya of S.B., Calcutta, 9 October 1946, ibid.
[199] Report of investigation by H.M. Bhattacharya, S.B., Calcutta, 26 September 1946, ibid.
[200] 'Miscellaneous – Communal Riots – CPI', 27 September 1946, K.P.M. No. 01817; S.B. File No. 938 Part I, P.M. (1946).
[201] Intercepted letter from G. Adhikari to Bhowani Sen, dated 29 August 1946, Ibid.

nated areas. The financial position of the Bengal and Calcutta Committees were rendered precarious, as collection of subscriptions from workers became difficult, and these subscriptions accounted for a substantial proportion of party funds. All District Committees devoted their few resources to preventing yet another riot and promoting goodwill among the communities.[202] But for smaller parties such as the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), organizational activities among labour came to a standstill after the riots.[203] Party leaders made an attempt to resume work from mid-September 1946. The North Calcutta District Committee of the RSP, for example, called on members of its Labour Front to devote at least four hours each week for party work.[204] The leadership directed them to make both Hindu and Muslim workers realise that communal riots were harmful for everyone and that these were instigated by the leaders of both communities and 'British Imperialists in furtherance of their own interests'.[205] Despite such directives, RSP workers reported after just a week that work among labourers was impossible because of communal tension; they found workers, especially Muslims, in parts of north Calcutta to be 'unresponsive'.[206] They told the leaders that work could not be resumed 'until the situation became normal'.[207] Similarly, leaders of the Forward Bloc concluded at a meeting in Calcutta in early September 1946 that 'the working class movement has received a serious set-back and the revolutionary fervour… had faded away'.[208] In September 1946, the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee also discussed how 'labour organizational work had been altogether suspended… in view of the high communal tension resulting from the recent riots in Cal-

[202] 'Socialism and Communism: Communist Party of India', 14 October 1946, ibid.
[203] 'Terrorist Groups: RSPI', 4 September 1946, ibid.
[204] 'Terrorist Groups: RSPI', 19 September 1946, ibid.
[205] Ibid.
[206] 'Terrorist Groups: RSPI', 26 September 1946.
[207] Ibid.
[208] 'Forward Bloc – All India Azad Hind Volunteer Corps – Madaripur, Jugantar', 6 September 1946, ibid.

cutta'.[209] Leaders of even smaller organizations, such as the Hindusthan Mazdur Sevak Sangha, went so far as to advise its organizers 'not to risk their lives by visiting the *bustee* areas', especially slums of Muslim workers, 'but only to maintain their links and contacts as far as possible'.[210]

This dislocation in economic relations continued throughout the period of decolonization. Independence brought in its wake, as the next chapter will show, a thorough rearrangement of the power dynamics between communities, organizations and people in Calcutta. This had profound consequences for commerce as well. 'Normalcy' returned only after Muslims had been totally cowed, after partition, as the next chapters will show.

Conclusion

This chapter provides insights into how Calcutta's inter-communal relations gradually collapsed. This process began before the August riots of 1946, reflected in everyday conflicts around use of sacred spaces and access to public resources. The massacre that the city witnessed during the Great Calcutta Killing was not altogether surprising, though its scale perhaps was. After the Killing, instances of stabbings and arson against rival communities became a part of everyday life. These were accompanied by a steady stream of rumours and vicious propaganda that kept both Hindus and Muslims in a state of constant fear for their lives. This had disastrous consequences for economic ties between different communities.

[209] 'Congress – BPCC', 10 September 1946, ibid.
[210] 'Hindusthan Mazdur Sevak Sangha', 10 September 1946, ibid.

What emerges, therefore, is a picture of a grave crisis of state authority. The provincial government, now under control of Muslim League ministers, came to be seen as corrupt and partial – a perception promoted by its political rivals, both Hindus and Muslims. Moreover, pervasive violence, both quotidian and spectacular, eroded public faith in the state's coercive apparatus. While Hindu propagandists exhorted their co-religionists not to rely on the police for protection, Muslim political rivals attempted to delegitimize the Suhrawardy Ministry in the eyes of Muslims by accusing it of Hindu appeasement. These had important ramifications, as the followings chapters will show.

Chapter 4

Towards Independence with Partition of Bengal

As the future of British India and the 'Pakistan question' came to dominate all-India politics by early 1947, Hindu-Muslim conflict in Calcutta took a distinct turn. The Cabinet declaration of 20 February 1947, which fixed a time-frame for British withdrawal from the subcontinent, changed the complexion of the debate on India's future.[1] It hinted at the possibility that the British government could well agree to divide British India into two successor states, conceding the Muslim League demand for a sovereign Pakistan. A large section of Bengali leaders championing the Hindu cause now turned the two-nation theory to their advantage. They argued that if, according to the Muslim League, Hindus and Muslims were two irreconcilable nations, and if it were impossible for the Muslim minority to live together in harmony with the Hindu majority in a united India, then, by the same logic, the Hindu minority of Bengal could not be expected to live under a polity dominated by the province's Muslim majority. Thus, they demanded that if British India were divided into India and Pakistan, Bengal must also be divided into two parts – a western Bengal with Hindu-majority areas and an eastern Bengal with Muslim-majority areas. While Pakistan could claim eastern Bengal, western Bengal had to be made a part of independent India. While a small section of the Bengal Muslim League leadership found the demand acceptable,

[1] For the high-politics of India's Partition and the significance of the Cabinet announcement on 20 February 1947, see, among others, Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslims League and the Demand for Partition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; Anita Inder Singh, *The Origins of the Partition of India, 1936-1947*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990.

there were other leaders, both Hindu and Muslim, who opposed the division of the province on communal lines. The latter group demanded a sovereign united Bengal, separate from both India and Pakistan. Calcutta, the nerve centre of Bengal's political life, became the theatre for this contest – between those who demanded Bengal's partition and those who wanted a sovereign nation-state of united Bengal. This chapter will study this conflict and argue that this period generated new symbols through which communal antagonisms were articulated in Calcutta.

This phase represented a grave crisis for the state. The figure of the Punjabi Muslim armed police emerged as the symbol around which communal tensions and the demand for Bengal's partition, coalesced and intertwined. In order to satisfy critics within his own party, Suhrawardy, the Premier, recruited a troop of Muslim policemen from the Punjab for the armed constabulary of the Calcutta Police. Congress and Mahasabha leaders launched a campaign to protest against this move and argued that if the whole of Bengal was allowed to pass into the hands of Pakistan, it would unleash a regime of unmitigated misery for Hindus. A crime allegedly involving newly recruited Punjabi Muslim policemen facilitated this campaign, which helped Hindu leaders mobilize support for Bengal's partition on the ground that Hindus could no longer expect any justice from the present regime, or any future government dominated by the Muslim League. Their argument was that not only had the day-to-day administration, in the hands of Muslim policemen and the 'corrupt' ministers, crumbled, but that no institution of the state remained functional to which ordinary Hindus could appeal for redressal of the wrongs they suffered everyday in the hands of the provincial government. Therefore, the only redemption available for the Hindus, they

claimed, lay in a radical restructuring of state power, including the vivisection of the province on communal lines.

The campaign for the partition of Bengal unfolded alongside the 'United Bengal' movement. It was the joint campaign of a few prominent provincial leaders of both the Muslim League and the Congress. The first section of the chapter delineates the contours of high politics in Bengal that laid the ground for the United Bengal campaign. It will show that the campaign cannot be explained exclusively by the altruistic motives of its leaders, as has been presupposed by existing historiography.

Historians have usually portrayed the demand for a united sovereign Bengal in idealist terms – as a last-ditch attempt of secular-minded leaders to preserve the unity of a region deeply tied together with a common culture and a shared way of life.[2] Often their analyses have tended to become teleological, with historians like Harun-or-Rashid and Bidyut Chakrabarty attempting to draw a direct link connecting the United Bengal campaign with the national self-determination movement in East Pakistan in 1971. Despite Joya Chatterji's critique of the campaign as nothing more than a mere 'pipe dream',[3] even she seems to agree that whatever the chances of its feasibility might have been, the objectives that drove the campaign were laudable. The second section re-examines this historiographical consensus and suggests a different reading.

[2] See Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947*, New Delhi: Impex India, 1973, pp. 223-245; Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1936-1947*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1987, pp. 244-248; Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers Against the Raj: A Biography of Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose*, New Delhi: Viking, 1989, pp. 576-585; Bidyut Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932-1947*, London, New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004, pp. 132-150.
[3] Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 260.

The next section reveals how those leaders campaigning against the United Bengal movement mobilized new symbols of Hindu-Muslim antagonism to their cause. It will show how the figure of the Punjabi Muslim armed police emerged as the focal point of the Bengal partition campaign in Calcutta.

The chapter then moves to an examination of the 100 Harrison Road Case – a sensational incident of crime in which a Punjabi Muslim policeman allegedly raped a Hindu woman. It analyzes the street mobilizations for a strike on the issue and how it was harnessed to the cause of the campaign for Bengal's partition. Finally, the chapter concludes by exploring the aftermath of the protests around the 100 Harrison Road Case and how the tempo of the partition campaign was maintained until the 3 June announcement, which conceded the demand for the partition of Bengal and rejected the United Bengal proposal.

Provincial Politics after the Great Calcutta Killing

After the Great Calcutta Killing in August 1946, Huseyn Suhrawardy, the Bengal Premier, tried to come to an understanding with the Congress and form a coalition government in the province. Shila Sen has suggested that Suhrawardy was brought to his senses by the calamity, which gave him 'second thoughts'.[4] She believes that Suhrawardy had 'changed his mind and sincerely wanted to restore confidence among Hindus'. [5] However, her optimism is neither substantiated nor persuasive.

[4] Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, p. 209.
[5] Ibid.

Suhrawardy's move can be explained better as a continuation of his old strategy of safeguarding and protecting his own position in the Bengal Ministry.

The previous chapter has described how the provincial elections of 1946 resulted in an overwhelming victory for the Muslim League in Bengal. Defeating rivals within his own party, Suhrawardy had emerged as the new Premier. Rather than appeasing his opponents, he had decided to reward his supporters with most of the important positions in the ministry. This strategy prompted him to seek an alliance with the Congress opposition. With Congress help, he hoped to maintain his sway over his enemies within his party. The alliance did not materialize, primarily due to the intransigence of the Bengal Congress. This rendered Suhrawardy's position vulnerable, encouraging intra-party intrigues within the Bengal League.

After the Great Calcutta Killing in August 1946, Suhrawardy's position became even more fragile. As Premier and the minister responsible for law and order, large sections of the public saw the Killing as proof of his incompetence.[6] Of course, the Muslim League maintained that the Hindus were equally, if not principally, responsible for the violence. But this did not prevent the rival Nazimuddin-Akram Khan faction from demanding a reshuffle of the ministry.[7] If those in the opposition within the Bengal legislatures accused him of anti-Hindu bias, opponents within his own party accused him of not doing enough for his co-religionists. The danger from his party

[6] For an account of how even Muslim Leaguers held Suhrawardy responsible for the Great Calcutta Killing, see Begum Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramulla, *Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy: A Biography*, Karachi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991. Also see Suhrawardy's memoirs: Mohammad H.R. Talukdar (ed.), *Memoirs of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy with a Brief Account of His Life and Work*, Dhaka: University Press, 1987.

[7] For an account of intra-party intrigues against Suhrawardy, see Ikramulla, *Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy*.

rivals to his dominance was greater than the danger from the opposition benches in the legislatures. Thus, Sen's contention that opposition demands in the Bengal legislatures for the removal of the ministry forced Suhrawardy to make another attempt at enlisting Congress support is untenable.[8] The opposition was not strong enough to overthrow the ministry so long as it maintained its existing support in the legislatures. This support, Suhrawardy knew, would still be forthcoming, as Leaguers did not want to topple the ministry altogether. Opponents within his party only wanted a rearrangement of power within the ministry – to get a bigger share of ministerial posts or, better still, to remove Suhrawardy and replace him with a leader of their own faction, preferably Nazimuddin. The latter could count on the support of Muslim big business, the Bengal Governor, the Viceroy, as well as Jinnah.[9] Intra-party intrigue was thus a much bigger threat to Suhrawardy's position than the opposition in the legislatures.

Suhrawardy's chances of success in negotiations with the Congress were not strong. The popularity of League-Congress unity slogans had faded away long ago. In April 1946, when Suhrawardy had attempted his first rapprochement with the Congress, the scenario had been very different. Yet it was not hopeless: the Bengal Congress leadership had for long resented its exclusion from all-India Congress politics.[10] The High Command had, time and again, refused to allow its Bengal leaders to come to any agreement with either the Krishak Praja Party or the Muslim League,[11] which

[8] Ibid., p. 220.
[9] For the support base of the Akram Khan-Nazimuddin faction, see Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*; Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh.*
[10] See Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*.
[11] For accounts of failure of the negotiations between Congress and Krishak Praja Party or the Muslim League, see Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*; Srimanjari, *Through War and Famine: Bengal, 1939-45*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2009; Chatterji, *Bengal* Divided; Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj*; Gordon, *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement, 1876-1940* New York;

did not increase the popularity of the central leadership in the eyes of many provincial leaders. Neither did the latter gain from the increasing prominence of the Congress on the all-India stage. When Congress formed the Interim Government towards the end of August 1946, Sarat Bose was the only leader from Bengal who was admitted into it.[12] This had done little to improve the standing of the Bengal Congress leaders in all-India politics. Thus, if somehow Suhrawardy could persuade the High Commands of both the League and the Congress to allow a provincial alliance between the two parties in Bengal, the leaders of the Bengal Congress might have been persuaded to see merit in his proposal.

Suhrawardy's efforts at securing the consent of the High Commands of the League and the Congress failed;[13] Jinnah refused to allow Suhrawardy to forge a provincial-level alliance with Congress until a 'satisfactory coalition at the Centre' had been achieved.[14] However, Suhrawardy's efforts did facilitate a compromise at the all-India stage. After meeting the Viceroy, he issued a statement from Delhi urging the Congress, which had already formed an Interim Government, to take a 'bold leap' and come to a compromise with Jinnah before the 'chasm yawned too wide to be bridged'.[15] It is doubtful if Suhrawardy would have made such a forceful appeal to the Congress without securing prior consent from Jinnah and Wavell.[16] By some accounts, Wavell was determined to bring the League into the Interim Government

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London: Columbia University press, 1974; Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam*; Harun-or-Rashid *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh.*

[12] Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj*, pp. 548-588.

[13] Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, pp. 219-220.

[14] Penderel Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, London: Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 348. Also, V.P. Menon, *Transfer of Power in India*, Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1957, p. 301.

[15] *The Statesman*, 10 September 1946. Also, Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, p. 221, f.n. 62.

[16] Ibid.

since his Calcutta visit in the aftermath of the Great Calcutta Killing.[17] When Wavell had arrived in the city on 26 August 1946, he was apparently shaken by black-flag demonstrations by the supporters of the League and the Muslim National Guard, who held him responsible for the carnage and for sabotaging Muslim interests by pandering to Congress demands.[18] Whatever Wavell's motivation may have been, following Suhrawardy's Delhi tour, he met Jinnah on 16 September 1946. Parleys between the two lasted from 12 to 15 October, which culminated in the League joining the Interim Government on 26 October 1946.

Jinnah, however, decided not to nominate any Bengal League leader to the Interim Government, choosing Jogendranath Mondal, leader of the Scheduled Caste Federation, instead. Jinnah's decision was aimed at making a point vis-à-vis the Congress. If the Congress had refused the League monopoly over Muslim nominees in the Interim Government, Jinnah wanted to show that the Congress could not claim to represent all Hindus either. At best, Congress represented the upper-caste Hindus. But it is arguable that Jinnah could well have accommodated a Scheduled Caste representative in one of the four seats allocated to North Indian Muslims.[19] In any case, the decision not to include any Bengal Leaguer, not even from his preferred Nazimuddin-Akram Khan-Ispahani faction, was deeply unsettling for the provincial leadership.[20] If Jinnah cared so little even for his loyal followers in Bengal, the Suhrawardy-Abul Hashim faction could hope for very little. The Bengal leaders had felt unrecognized by Jinnah

[17] Ibid., p. 220.
[18] *Star of India*, 26 August 1946; *Azad,* 27 August 1946; Menon, *Transfer of Power in India*, p. 301.
[19] Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, p. 222.
[20] Ibid., pp. 221-222.

for a long time.[21] But this development made them feel insulted.[22] This was the context in which the United Bengal campaign emerged towards the beginning of 1947.

'Sovereign United Bengal' and Its Leaders

On 20 February 1947, British Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced the 'definite intention' of Britain of withdrawing from India by June 1948, transferring power, if required, to provincial governments.[23] Sensing a hint of partition of the subcontinent in Attlee's declaration, the Hindu Mahasabha changed its demand from *Akhand* (United) Hindustan to a call for the partition of Punjab and Bengal. If the League believed that Hindus and Muslims were, indeed, two different nations with irreconcilable interests, Mahasabha leaders argued, then the large Hindu and Sikh minorities of the Punjab and Bengal could not be expected to live under perpetual Muslim domination in Pakistan.[24] In a similar vein, on 8 March 1947, the Working Committee of the All India Congress passed a resolution calling for the division of the Punjab in the event that India was to be partitioned.[25] Acharya Kripalani, the Congress President, confirmed in a press interview that the same principle would apply to Bengal as well.[26] Less than a month later, on 4 April 1947, the Bengal Provincial Congress

[21] Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, pp. 244-248.
[22] Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, p. 222.
[23] Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon (eds.), *The Transfer of Power, 1942-47: Constitutional Relations between Britain and India*, (Hereafter *TP*), London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1980, vol. IX, no. 438, pp. 773-775.
[24] Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, p. 274; Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, p. 225.
[25] *TP*, vol. IX, no. 51, pp. 899-901.
[26] Fortnightly Report, Government of Bengal, (Hereafter, FR, GOB), 1st half, March 1947, L/PJ/5/154, India Office Records (Hereafter, IOR); *Star of India*, 11 March 1947; *TP*, vol. X, no. 168, pp. 308-309.

Committee also declared its support for the partition of Bengal.[27] This was followed by the Hindu Mahasabha adopting a 'line of action' at its Annual Session at Tarakeswar in Hooghly district of Bengal as a blue-print for dividing Bengal.[28] It asked the Constituent Assembly to appoint a Boundary Commission to determine the borders of a Hindu-majority province of West Bengal, to constitute a separate legislative body for Hindu legislators of Bengal and to set up two Regional Ministries – one for Muslim-majority eastern Bengal and the other for Hindu-majority western Bengal. As is well known, the demand for a separate province of West Bengal carved out of Hindu-majority areas of the province gained support from Calcutta's Hindu big business houses, including the Birlas and the Goenkas.[29] Influential newspapers such as *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Ananda Bazar Patrika* and *Hindusthan Standard* initiated a vigorous press campaign for the partition of Bengal.[30] Yet, in April 1947, a section of prominent Muslim Leaguers and Congressmen of Bengal launched a movement not just to keep the province united, but to create a sovereign United Bengal independent of both India and Pakistan. They argued that Bengal's distinct cultural and linguistic identity had to take precedence over religious considerations in determining the future of the Bengali people.

Historians have presented the demand for an independent United Bengal in either sentimental or teleological terms. Shila Sen, for example, sees this demand as a genuine expression of a sentimental desire to keep Bengal united, at least on the part of

[27] Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, p. 275.
[28] *TP*, vol. X, no. 127, p. 203.
[29] *The Statesman*, 1 May 1947; Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, p. 276.
[30] Ibid.

some Hindu and Muslim leaders.[31] According to her, 'both Suhrawardy and Abul Hashim made a sincere and earnest effort to make Bengal independent and sovereign'.[32] Apart from the intransigence of many Congress and League leaders, Sen argues that the effort failed mainly due to time constraints. Under the charged circumstances, it was impossible to arrive at a consensus of Bengal leaders on the issue by 2 June 1947, when the British government decided to finalize the *modus operandi* of British withdrawal from the subcontinent.[33] Leonard A. Gordon, biographer of the Bose brothers, agrees with Sen about limitations of time that eventually led to the failure of the United Bengal scheme. Among other factors, he emphasizes how Sarat Bose restricted his discussions on the United Bengal proposal only to top League and Congress leaders, and did not reach out to the public, partly due to his bad health. But he celebrates the scheme nonetheless as a real alternative to the partition demand. He also holds the Congress High Command responsible, especially Nehru and Patel, for pushing Mountbatten to partition India instead of 'balkanizing' it.[34] Sarat Bose was subsequently blacked out of the Congress press, says Gordon.[35] Faced with Nehru and Patel's 'veto' against the scheme, and Shyama Prasad Mookerjee's 'pro-partition coalition', he opines, the United Bengal movement eventually collapsed.[36] Harun-or-Rashid, on the other hand, places this episode in a longer and linear teleology of Bengal's demand for autonomy, which finally culminated in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.[37] Bidyut Chakrabarty also draws a direct connection between the United Bengal movement and the 1952 'Language Movement' in East Pakistan and, eventually, the

[31] Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, pp. 223-245.
[32] Ibid., p. 230.
[33] Ibid., p. 241.
[34] Gordon, pp. 579-580.
[35] Ibid., p. 581.
[36] Ibid., p. 582.
[37] Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, pp. 273-340.

self-determination movement for Bangladesh in 1971.[38] Only Joya Chatterji has expressed some scepticism about the campaign.[39] Even so, almost all historians hail the over-all principle behind the campaign as a counterpoint to the rampant communalism that characterized the demand for the partition of India and Bengal. Even if one granted the anti-communal inspiration of the United Bengal campaign, the self-interest of its leadership remains too obvious to miss. Yet, these concerns have hitherto been overlooked. This is not to reduce the movement to the self-seeking impulses of leaders; however, a discussion of these dimensions can help in preventing its uncritical celebration and explain its failures better.

Sarat Bose and Abul Hashim conceived of the idea of a sovereign United Bengal for the first time in a series of meetings in January 1947. This predated the 20 February Cabinet declaration, lending some credence to the claim that it was not a mere knee-jerk reaction to the possibility of a partition of both India and Bengal.

Even at the risk of some reductive analysis, it is possible to explain Hashim's enthusiasm for a sovereign United Bengal by his position within the Muslim League and his roots in western Bengal. If Jinnah's nomination to the interim government was any indicator, Suhrawardy-Hashim faction of the Bengal League had little hope of gaining any rewards from the League High Command. If Bengal was divided, there was little doubt that League Central leadership in a future Pakistan would prefer the rival Nazimuddin-Akram Khan faction. The latter had a stronger base of support in eastern Bengal and backing from Muslim big business. But, perhaps even more important for

[38] Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam,* pp. 132-150.
[39] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, p. 260.

Hashim was his personal attachment to western Bengal. Despite being trained in Arabic and Islamic theology since childhood, Hashim's background reveals a somewhat Hindu *bhadralok*-like characteristics. Hailing from Kashiari in the district of Burdwan in western Bengal, Hashim was born into a family of government servants who were, at the same time, 'landlords in their own village'.[40] His family had taken to western education at least since his grandfather's times; he seems proud, indeed, that his grandfather was a 'class fellow' of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, and that his father was a loyal follower of Sir Surendranath Banerjea.[41] Again, not unlike Nirad C. Chaudhuri,[42] Hashim talks about the importance that his family attached to their ancestral home in the village. Members of his family thought that cities were 'good for working and earning', but 'not for living', he says; for everyone in his extended household, holidays had to be spent in the village, no matter where they worked. Hashim also had deep professional base in Burdwan. He was called to the Distract Bar at Burdwan and had practiced for five years as a successful lawyer, before joining politics.[43] He had been elected to the provincial assembly also from the Burdwan Mohammadan Constituency.[44] His deep personal attachment to his roots in western Bengal, therefore, was apparent. He shared very little in common with the landed aristocracy that was sure to dominate the politics of eastern Bengal in case the province was partitioned. Given these factors, Hashim's enthusiasm for a United Bengal becomes quite understandable. Right to the very end, he insisted that the demand for a sovereign United Bengal was in conformity with the Lahore Resolution, which had

[40] Abul Hashim, *In Retrospection*, Dacca: Sabarna Publishers, 1974.
[41] For a description of Hashim's family background, see ibid., pp. 1-5.
[42] See Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, London: Hogarth, 1987, pp. 48-50. Also see Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, pp. 6-7.
[43] Hashim, *In Retrospection*, pp. 11-16.
[44] Ibid., p. 16.

formed the basis for the League's Pakistan demand. There was nothing in the Resolution, he claimed, that called for an *Akhand Pakistan*.[45]

On the Congress benches, meanwhile, by the time negotiation for United Bengal began, Sarat Bose was profoundly disgruntled. After his release from jail in September 1945, he had a brief period of rapprochement within the Congress High Command.[46] He rapidly rose to positions of eminence within the All-India Congress. In December 1945, he was elected to the Central Assembly. He became the leader of the opposition when the Congress Parliamentary Party elected him as their leader in the Assembly on 19 January 1946. In September 1946, he joined the Interim Government. However, once the Muslim League decided to enter the Interim Government on 26 October 1946, he was made to step down. This also marked his estrangement from the Congress High Command. Soon, he publicly fell out with important all-India leaders of the Congress. On 6 January 1947 he resigned from the Congress Working Committee.[47] Thus, when he entered into discussions with Abul Hashim about the possibility of keeping Bengal united and separate from both India and Pakistan, he had already lost his battle for a place on the all-India stage. For him, alliance with the Muslim League in a sovereign Bengal could have been a promising prospect.

The other prominent Congress leader who supported Bose's endeavours was Kiran Sankar Roy. On the surface of it, Roy's attitude may seem somewhat puzzling, given

[45] Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, p. 232; Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, p. 299.
[46] See Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal*, p. 224, f.n. 67, for a brief outline of Sarat Bose's political trajectory since his release from prison in 1945.
[47] Ibid. Also see Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj*, pp. 548-588.

that he had almost always remained loyal to the Congress High Command.[48] But his willingness to join the United Bengal campaign can, at least partly, be explained by his extensive landed interests in the eastern Bengal countryside. Of course, he was an established Calcutta politician. But his identity as the *zamindar* of Teota was no less important. In this respect, he was typical of the bhadralok elites of Calcutta to whom their landed connection was as important to their identity and prosperity as their urbane lifestyles.[49] There is some evidence in the police records that point to troubles in his *zamindari* after the Great Calcutta Killing. A panicky letter from one of his estate managers warned Roy of the growing hostility among Muslim peasants towards Hindu landowners in eastern Bengal.[50] From the Naib to the humble peon, many of Roy's *zamindary cutcheries* were run almost entirely by Muslim personnel, besides being surrounded by Muslim villages on all sides. The manager warned him that any flicker of communal violence would make his estate the first target of Muslim attack.[51] Roy's reactions are not known, but the importance he attached to his landed possessions is proved by his eventual migration to East Bengal after Partition and his decision to join

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[48] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided.*

[49] For a discussion of the way the Bengali *bhadralok* has been described in historiography, see ibid., pp. 3-17. The early contributors to the debate include: J.H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth-Century Bengal*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968; Gordon Johnson, 'Partition, Agitation and Congress: Bengal, 1904-1908', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1973. Some have argued in favour of rejecting *bhadralok* and replacing it with 'middle class': Himani Banerji, 'The Mirror of Class: Class Subjectivity and Politics in 19th Century Bengal', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 24; no. 13, May 1989; Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Subhas Chandra Bose and Middle-Class Radicalism: A Study in Indian Nationalism, 1928-1950*, London: London School of Economics and Political Science with Tauris, 1990. Studies that have emphasized the landed connection of the *bhadralok* include: Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*; John McGuire, *The Making of a Colonial Mind: A Quantitative Study of the Bhadralok in Calcutta, 1857-1885*, Canberra: Australian National University, 1983; S.N. Mukherjee, 'Caste, Class and Politics in Calcutta' in his *Calcutta: Myths and History*, Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1977; Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973; Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

[50] Gopal Hari Basu to Kiran Sankar [Roy], 7 September 1946, K.P.M. No. 01486/05; S.B. File No. 506, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.

[51] Ibid.

its legislatures as the leader of the opposition.[52] He was willing to take the risk, despite the fact that his stature as one of the leading Congress personalities of Bengal could have easily secured for him a senior ministerial post in the government of West Bengal, or even in Delhi. This is exactly what happened when he finally lost all hope of carving out a political future within Pakistan, and moved back to West Bengal as its Home Minister. Given this evidence and his personal trajectory, it is not surprising that in early 1947 Roy threw his weight behind the United Bengal movement.

The official inauguration of the United Bengal movement began, however, with Suhrawardy's statement at a press conference in Delhi on 27 April 1947.[53] Suhrawardy, the Premier of Bengal, was a thorough-bred Calcutta man. Despite the fact that the poor Muslim peasantry of eastern Bengal formed much of the social base of support for the Muslim League in the province, Suhrawardy's political base was urbane, rooted in the drawing rooms and working class neighbourhoods of the city. He had cut his teeth in Calcutta's trade union politics.[54] For him, Calcutta was his political life-line. If Bengal was divided, it was clear that Calcutta, as a Hindu-majority city, would become a part of West Bengal and remain with India. It was also clear that in such circumstances League politics would have no future in India or in the new province of West Bengal. Exiled from Calcutta, Suhrawardy would become a 'political refugee in East Bengal'.[55]

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[52] Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 72, 114.
[53] *The Statesman*, 28 April 1947; *Star of India*, 28 April 1947.
[54] Kenneth McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm: Calcutta, 1918 to 1935*, Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1974; Also see Ikramulla, *Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy*; Talukdar (ed.), *Memoirs of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy*.
[55] Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, p. 331.

Ultimately, the fate of Calcutta became the focal point around which the demands and counter-demands about the future of Bengal coalesced. Suhrawardy, of course, declared in his press statement in Delhi that 'in the end the tussle will rage around Calcutta'.[56] During negotiations with the Cabinet Mission, Jinnah had declared, 'Pakistan without Calcutta would be like asking a man to live without his heart'.[57] In fact, the United Bengal movement initially had Jinnah's approval as he preferred a viable sovereign state of United Bengal with Calcutta as an ally of Pakistan. He preferred this to an impoverished eastern Bengal within Pakistan, which would be more of a liability for the new Muslim nation rather than an asset. He seemed to have changed his mind later when he feared that the proposed state of United Bengal may not ally itself with Pakistan.[58] The British Indian administration was also concerned about the fate of Calcutta. Frederick Burrows, the Governor of Bengal, also held that East Bengal without Calcutta would become a 'rural slum'.[59] If the thriving port of Calcutta had to survive, he felt that Calcutta had to be made a 'free city'.[60] The Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, saw Burrows' point,[61] but was convinced that the Congress would never accept such a proposal.[62] The Congress was also adamant to retain Calcutta within India because, as Nehru explained, 'Calcutta was the port for the whole of Northern India'.[63]

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[56] Ibid., p. 285.
[57] *TP*, vol. VII, no. 48, p. 124. See Jalal, *Sole Spokesman*, p. 179.
[58] For Jinnah's attitude to United Bengal, see Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, pp. 287-295.
[59] Minutes of Viceroy's Ninth Miscellaneous Meeting, *TP*, vol. X, no. 264, pp. 507-513.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Mountbatten to Burrows, *TP*, vol. X, no. 242, pp. 471-472.
[63] Minutes of Viceroy's Fourteenth Miscellaneous Meeting, *TP*, vol. X, no. 405, pp. 762-764.

Conversely, despite a brief initial flirtation with the United Bengal scheme, the Nazimuddin-Akram Khan faction decided to settle for partition if the whole of Bengal could not be retained as an integral part of Pakistan. In fact, getting rid of Calcutta, for them, was a politically tempting idea, despite its possible adverse economic consequences. Without Calcutta, Dacca would emerge as the new centre of power in a divided eastern Bengal. With their political base firmly planted in Ahsan Manzil, the palace of the Nawab of Dacca, the Nazimuddin-Akram Khan faction of the Bengal League would easily prevail over their rivals. According to some observers, this 'Dacca group', therefore was 'so anxious to desert Calcutta' that they 'outdid' Syama Prasad Mookerjee in agitating for Bengal's partition.[64]

This 'Dacca group' unleashed relentless propaganda against the Bengal Ministry for not doing enough to promote Muslim interests. They took advantage of popular resentment and everyday economic grievances of Muslims under Suhrawardy's government. Hindu merchants usually controlled food grains, coal and other fuels in the Calcutta market; and as economic relations between communities fell apart following communal riots, Muslim families found procuring such necessities increasingly difficult.[65] Many Muslim shopkeepers found themselves ousted from markets in Hindu-majority areas. A great number of those driven out of Koley Market, Lansdowne Market, as well as markets in Stand Road, Clive Street and Manicktolla had to earn their living selling commodities on footpaths of Muslim-majority areas of the city.[66] Muslim students also found it difficult to access educational institutions. Schools, col-

[64] Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, p. 327, f.n. 313. Also see Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dyakha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar*, Dacca: Naoroj Kitabistan, 1975, pp. 260-262.
[65] 'Miscellaneous: Communal Situation in Calcutta', 30 September 1946, K.P.M. No. 01817/05; S.B. File No. 938 Part I; P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[66] Ibid.

leges and universities tended to be in Hindu-dominated areas, or required Muslim students to pass through Hindu-majority localities.[67] Suhrawardy's rivals within the Bengal League attempted to capitalize on such popular anxieties by insisting on reshuffling the ministry. They blamed Suhrawardy's ministry for not doing enough to open more shops and educational institutions in Muslim areas and for failing to protect lives and livelihood of ordinary Muslims of the city. Rival factions within the Bengal branch and the Calcutta District branch of the Muslim League, as well as several 'relief committees' it had set up in the aftermath of the riots, put pressure on the Ministry to ensure that at least fifty per cent of appointments in all departments of the government were reserved for Muslim candidates.[68]

Pressed upon from all sides by the rival faction, and unable to garner support from the Congress opposition, Suhrawardy needed to do something that would make a bold statement, proving his sincerity in promoting 'Muslim interests'. This was the context in which the Suhrawardy Ministry recruited about five hundred personnel to the Armed Police of Calcutta from the Punjab. Classified as a 'martial race', the presence of such policemen in the city's streets, Suhrawardy seemed to believe, would visibly demonstrate his commitment towards protecting Calcutta's Muslims.[69] The figure of the Punjabi Armed Police emerged, thereafter, as the symbol around which communal

[67] Ibid.
[68] 'Communal Situation and the Muslims', 31 October 1946, ibid.
[69] Sir Francis Tuker, *While Memory Serves*, London: Cassell, 1950, pp. 233-236. Tuker describes the blatant favouritism with which the Suhrawardy government treated the newly-recruited Punjabi armed policemen, generating resentment among other sections of the armed police forces of Calcutta, especially the Gurkha armed policemen. That this new recruitment drive did boost some support for Suhrawardy among some sections of Calcutta's Muslims is suggested by how strongly the recruitment was defended by powerful sections of the Muslim League Press. See, *Azad*, 8 April 1947, in K.P.M. No. 01821/05, File No. 938/47 II (C), P.M. (1947), SBR CP. The article, published in a newspaper not known for being favourable to Suhrawardy, demanded more of such recruitments.

animosity found articulation in Calcutta; it structured public debates on the demand for partition of Bengal in the event that a Muslim state was to be carved out of British India.

The Deterioration of 'Law and Order' and Rebellion in the Calcutta Police

Police administration in Calcutta deteriorated steadily after the August Killing. This attracted virulent criticism. In a letter to the editor of *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, a retired police officer held changes in the policing system of Calcutta responsible for the breakdown of order.[70] According to him, in the aftermath of the communal riots of 1926,[71] a 'Harrison Road Safety Scheme' had been set up by Sir Charles Tegart, then Commissioner of the Calcutta Police. This entailed posting police pickets at strategic points across the city and dedicating forces to accompany even the smallest of processions. Police headquarters informed local *thanas* whenever a procession passed through their jurisdiction. Accordingly, concerned *thanas* posted pickets all along the procession to keep participants under constant observation. A booklet containing details of the scheme, along with a map of Calcutta, was distributed to all officers. The scheme was so successful, the writer claimed, that even during the difficult days of the Civil Disobedience agitation in the 1930s, Calcutta remained peaceful. However, since November 1945, Tegart's scheme had been abandoned and replaced by the 'Control Room System'. According to this new policing structure, every occurrence

[70] 'Calcutta Police and Riots', Letters to the Editor, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 26 November 1946.

[71] For accounts of the 1926 riots in Calcutta see Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 59-102; Pradip Kumar Dutta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth-Centure Bengal*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 238-296; Kenneth McPherson, *The Muslim Microcosm.*

of trouble had to be reported directly to the Control Room of the Calcutta police headquarters at Lal Bazar, which sent out mobile police squads to the area in which violence had broken out. The problem with this method was that, in most cases, police squads reached the spot too late, when 'mobs' had already committed the 'mischief' and disappeared at the sight of police lorries.[72] Such mobile squads were 'like so many birds of passages which harmlessly flew over troubled areas, riotous mobs melting away at their sight to form again after they have passed'.[73] Even if it produced 'some spectacular effect', as a riot control scheme 'it proved very innocuous'.[74] 'Order' was only restored, the ex-officer opined, when the army took over and employed a version of the old scheme. The author, claiming some experience 'of the inner workings of the city police force', believed that the breakdown of police administration during the August Killing was not due to 'inefficiency' but a 'deliberate conspiracy at the top'.[75]

Whatever legitimacy remained of the police force as an impartial state agency was severely compromised in the aftermath of the August carnage. Losing trust in the police to protect lives and property, wealthy residents of the city had come to rely increasingly on private security arrangements. As these were dictated by communal considerations, the private security labour market of Calcutta became more and more stratified along communal lines. A police report in mid-September 1946 expressed concern at the possibility of clashes between the private guards of different communities. Hindu merchants of Burrabazar were reportedly employing only Sikh and Nepali

[72] 'Calcutta Police and Riots', Letters to the Editor, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 26 November 1946.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.

security guards to protect their houses and business establishments. Similarly, Muslim merchants of Amratolla Street were employing only 'Pathans' and 'other able bodied Muslims from the UP and the Punjab'.[76]

Allegations that the police force was partial were not without foundation. On 15 October 1946, for example, an informant reported to the Criminal Investigation Department that Muslim police officers made no secret of their pro-Muslim League sentiments. Hindu organizations, on the other hand, were attempting to 'enlist the sympathy of Hindu officers and men',[77] in which they seemed to be successful. By early 1947, high-ranking European police officers would refer to the communal biases of low-ranking policemen almost as an administrative 'common sense'. An outbreak of localized violence in some pockets of South Calcutta on 16 March 1947 led the local police stations to evacuate Muslim shopkeepers of Lansdowne Market, Jagu Babu Bazaar and Oriya Para to 'safe zones', virtually conceding the incapacity of the local police to protect minorities.[78] During religious processions and festivities, only those policemen belonging to the concerned religion were deployed as watchers, with the assumption that policemen of the 'other' religion, if posted on such occasions, would invariably result in clashes.[79] Senior European police officers found it so exceptional that low-ranking personnel should report against communal propaganda carried out by

[76] 'Miscellaneous: Communal Situation in Calcutta', 18 September 1946, K.P.M. 01817/05, S.B. File No. 938 Part I, P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[77] 'Secret Information, Intelligence Branch, CID, 13 Lord Sinha Road, Calcutta', 15 October 1946, ibid.
[78] Confidential Diary entry from Sub-Inspector A.C. Bhattacharya of SB, Calcutta, 21 March 1947, K.P.M. No. 01824/05, S.B. File No. 938 V, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[79] Order issued by K.H. Reza, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Special Branch, Calcutta, undated (but issued sometime before 23 March 1947, ibid.

their own community that they found it necessary to felicitate such heroes with monetary rewards.[80]

Yet the elitist condescension of superior officers towards their rank and file appear hollow given how the integrity of higher officials of the police force was compromised. Following the Great Calcutta Killing, government had appointed a Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Inquiry to investigate the phenomenon. In this connection, the Chairman of the Commission, Sir Patrick Spens interviewed officers of the Calcutta Police. By March 1947, reported *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, complaints were being lodged that 'higher authorities' were forcing junior police officers to withhold information from the Commission.[81] Superiors within Calcutta Police were allegedly taking their juniors to task for divulging details of the working of the police force during the 'disturbances' in course of their depositions. Despite protests from Spens, it is doubtful if any action was taken to even investigate these allegations. Thus, by early 1947, whatever credibility such 'independent' agencies of the state had retained until this point were thoroughly compromised.

With the legitimacy of the police force thus compromised, the army began to be called in support of civil administration with increasing frequency. The Suhrawardy government had delayed its request for military assistance during the August Killing, for which it had faced public approbation. Once the army was brought in, however, it could not be withdrawn fully even months after the worst was over. Sir Francis Tuker,

[80] Confidential diary entry by A.S.I. Monomohon Bhattacharjee of SB, Calcutta, 10 May 1947, K.P.M. No. 01822/05, S.B. File No. 938 III, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[81] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 7 March 1947. The report titled 'Police Official's Dilemma – Calcutta Riots Enquiry: Report of Penalization for Giving Evidence' has been filed by the Special Branch in K.P.M. No. 01823/05, S.B. File No. 938 (IV), P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.

the Officer Commanding of the Eastern Command, remembered soldiers patrolling Calcutta on 'pure police work' in early 1947, with the difference that, unlike the police, they did not have the powers of search and arrest.[82] Army technical staff was always kept on standby to take over Calcutta's essential services – electricity and water supply, sanitary services and suchlike – in case of strikes or rioting that repeatedly brought the city to a standstill.[83]

Tuker's unabashedly imperialist account of the last days of the Raj positions the army as a martyr in a story of native civilian incompetence. He contends that it was always a tight rope walk for the army during civilian duties, as its personnel received no thanks for their services but ran the risk of 'false accusations of cruelty, housebreaking and rape'.[84] However, his descriptions of everyday violence in the city are revealing. Official figures for casualties resulting from communal violence for the week ending 1 April 1947 numbered over seven hundred in Calcutta alone; yet, Tuker confesses, it was impossible to point towards specific incidents. 'Little crowds, little affairs in little streets; leaving behind them on the ground two or three dead with a few injured… In the end casualties climb into the thousands.'[85] Police and the army strove to restore and maintain a new kind of 'peace': 'a chronic situation in which individual *goondas* took their toll on isolated and unprotected members of the other community but in which mobs found little opportunity to battle with each other'.[86]

[82] Tuker, *While Memory Serves*, p. 221.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., p. 223.
[85] Ibid., p. 230.
[86] Ibid.

Spectacular displays of state power had some effect in controlling the violence. The All India Pakistan Day, celebrated by the Muslim League in Calcutta on 23 March 1947, according to the police, had every possibility of precipitating a fresh wave of violence. The police prevented this by issuing orders of blanket arrests, banning processions or assemblies by invoking Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Curfew in the evenings became routine.[87] The police seized all loudspeakers installed for public speeches intended to raise enthusiasm for Pakistan.[88] Official circulars emphasized the need for 'nipping trouble in the bud'.[89] Even such drastic action did not prevent low-key violence. Tuker remembers that firing by police and troops had become a regular and ordinary affair, 'as did stabbing, assaults and bomb and acid throwing'.[90]

Matters came to a head in early April 1947 when Calcutta witnessed a major police rebellion. On the night of 1 April 1947, a Gurkha armed constable killed a Muslim taxi driver near the Museum in Central Calcutta.[91] What exactly led to the clash remains obscure, but it created a sensation as the incident came to be projected in terms of Hindu attack upon a Muslim. The offending policeman was arrested and charged with murder. This led to a rebellion of Gurkha armed constables within Calcutta Police. They refused to carry out orders, prevented their superior officer from leaving his

[87] Order issued by K.H. Reza, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Special Branch, Calcutta, undated (but issued sometime before 23 March 1947, K.P.M. No. 01824/05, S.B. File No. 938 V, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[88] Tuker, *While Memory Serves*, pp. 228-229.
[89] Order issued by K.H. Reza, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Special Branch, Calcutta, undated (but issued sometime before 23 March 1947, K.P.M. No. 01824/05, S.B. File No. 938 V, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP. For a discussion of the colonial state's 'coercive network', the repertoire of violence the colonial state used throughout the twentieth century, see Taylor C. Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India*, New York; London: Routledge, 2010.
[90] Tuker, *While Memory Serves*, p. 229.
[91] For an account of the police rebellion, see ibid., pp. 234-237.

barracks and demanded that the Police Commissioner should come to them and hear their grievances.[92] When the Commissioner did so, it became clear that the objectives of the protesters were not confined to the arrest and murder charge against their colleague. Their main complaint was about discriminatory treatment by the Bengal Government, which, in their view, favoured the newly recruited Muslim armed police battalion from the Punjab. Recruited in a hurry, no immediate accommodation was available to house them. As a result, Ispahani, the Muslim businessman and Muslim League stalwart, had offered them his Calcutta mansion as barracks. Thus, it was rumoured, they rolled in luxury. The Gurkha armed police, on the other hand, lived in 'wretched barracks, little more than huts', and suffered mistreatment by the government.[93] The Commissioner immediately released the arrested Gurkha constable and promised an enquiry into their living conditions and charges of discrimination. However, soon after this agreement, another enquiry was held into the 1 April firings and the police rearrested the accused constable once again, only to release him and withdraw all charges a few days later. This official mishandling of the case, Tuker remembers, had grave consequences. '[T]he next time the Gurkha went out on patrol they used their rifles without provocation.'[94] Numerous fights broke out on the following days between Gurkha armed policemen and the Muslim population of the city.[95]

[92] Ibid., p. 234.
[93] Tuker, *While Memory Serves*, p. 234. For living conditions in police barracks and police protest in Bengal, see Partha Pratim Shil, 'Police Labour and State Formation in Bengal, c.1860 – c.1950', PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2017, pp. 97-102. Also see Sumanta Banerjee, *The Wicked City: Crime and Punishment in Colonial Calcutta,* Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2009, pp. 548-460.
[94] Tuker, *While Memory Serves*, p. 235.
[95] Ibid.

The term 'Gurkha', says Lionel Caplan, has to be understood as a 'fiction', not in the sense that it was a mere 'fabrication' but as an identity that came to be 'fashioned'.[96] It was used in a variety of ways in British colonial writings. In military mythology, colonial writers portrayed them as descendants of the ruling dynasty of Nepal who had conquered the land in the eighteenth century. But the term was used in a variety of senses. It sometimes referred to the whole population of Nepal; but, more frequently, it was a catch-all term that collapsed several ethnic and tribal communities speaking a variety of Tibeto-Burman languages whom the British military authorities classified as the 'martial races' of Nepal.[97]

The Gurkha personnel in the armed battalions of Calcutta Police, according to Tuker, were ''domiciled' Gurkhas'.[98] They were at least the second generation among migrants from Nepal, many of them being 'half-caste' (in Tuker's racist terminology), as they frequently had 'Indian mother[s]'.[99] Given their martial race stereotypes, the military authorities did not believe that they were 'of the same steady material straight from Nepal'. Therefore, they usually found lesser employment as clerks and bandsmen in Gurkha regiments of the Indian Army.[100] In police work, however, the Gurkha armed constabulary was 'the one reliable police force that Calcutta possessed', which had 'taken the government safely through all disturbances of the past two years'.[101] They were hated by Hindus and Muslims alike, yet they constituted, in Tuker's opin-

[96] Lionel Caplan, *Warrior Gentlemen: "Gurkhas" in the Western Imagination*, Providence; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995, pp. 10-13; Also see David N. Gellner, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and John Whelpton (eds.), *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom: The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal*, Amsterdam: Hardwood Academic Publishers, 1997.
[97] Tuker, *While Memory Serves*, p. 235.
[98] Ibid., p. 233.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid., pp. 234-235.
[101] Ibid., p. 234.

ion, the only section of Calcutta's police force 'that could be depended upon to stand on the burning streets when all but they of the police had fled'.[102] During the Calcutta protests surrounding the trials of the Indian National Army personnel, the protesters, Hindu and Muslim alike, saw Gurkha police as traitors. By 1947, however, Gurkha policemen saw themselves as Hindus, discriminated against by a Muslim ministry, which favoured Muslim policemen. Eventually, in the communally charged atmosphere of the city, the Hindus of Calcutta saw Gurkhas as their protectors against Punjabi Muslim policemen, 'The Pakistan Occupation Army of Bengal' as they also came to be called.[103]

In the last months of British rule, the Punjabi Muslim police contingent became the focal point of attacks against the Suhrawardy ministry. The Hindu Mahasabha, with the support of the Bengal Congress, emerged as the champion of Hindu grievances against Punjabi Muslim police oppression. Such protests crystallized around the sensational 100 Harrison Road Case, an incident which remained at the centre of Hindu propaganda for the partition of Bengal during the last days of colonial rule.

The 100 Harrison Road Case

On the night of 14 April 1947, a bomb exploded on Harrison Road.[104] Explosions of this sort had, by this time, become commonplace in Calcutta. Yet what happened as

[102] Ibid., p. 236.
[103] Ibid., p. 234.
[104] *Hindusthan Standard*, 20 May 1947.

a consequence of this incident had a profound impact on the politics of partition in Bengal.

After the explosion, two newly-recruited Punjabi Muslim Armed Policemen posted at a nearby police picket went into the house at 100 Harrison Road, apparently to investigate the matter. It was a four-storied building. The two policemen climbed the stairs all the way to the top floor, broke into an apartment and, allegedly, raped a Hindu woman. As news of the incident spread, the Deputy Commissioner of North Division, Mr. Hafizuddin Ahmad, went to the house next morning, only to find that the family had fled. On returning to the Jorasanko Police Station, he found that the woman and her husband had come to the *thana* to register a complaint. An identification parade was conducted. The victim identified one Muhammad Ali as the policeman who had raped her, while her husband identified the accomplice, Golam Hossain.[105] The police arrested the accused policemen and brought them to the court of the Additional Chief Presidency Magistrate on 22 April 1947.[106]

By this time, however, the incident had already assumed centre-stage in the Hindu campaign for the partition of Bengal. On 17 April 1947, the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha held a meeting at their Calcutta office presided over by Mahasabha veteran Nirmal Chandra Chatterjee. Condemning the 100 Harrison Road incident, the Mahasabha decided to observe a *hartal* on 23 April 'to mark the inauguration of an all-out campaign for the removal of the Punjabi policemen'.[107] This meeting also de-

[105] Ibid.
[106] *Hindusthan Standard*, 23 April 1947.
[107] 'Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha', undated, K.P.M. No. 01820/05; S.B. File No. 938 II, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.

clared that this strike should be regarded 'as one of the first steps towards the partition movement'.[108] Warning that the Muslim League government could take 'drastic action to suppress this agitation', the Mahasabha advised Hindus to prepare for 'self-defence to meet any contingency'.[109] In the communally charged atmosphere, this amounted to nothing less than inciting violence.

On 20 April, Hindu Mahasabha organized a public meeting at the Calcutta University Institute Hall, once more presided over by N.C. Chatterjee. The audience numbered over two thousand.[110] Chatterjee condemned the 'uniformed men' who had recently been 'imported from the Punjab and let loose on the citizens of Calcutta'.[111] 'In any civilized country', he asserted, 'the Minister in charge of law and order would have been thrown out of office within twenty-four hours'.[112] However, the Government and other legislators, he lamented, had become 'pathetic spectators of the dishonour of our women and the persecution of our men'.[113]

In a discursive twist, Chatterjee insisted that the issue was not communal at all. The Bengali Hindus were even ready to accept the League government's decision, despite being 'against all canons of justice', to have an overwhelmingly non-Hindu police force in a predominantly Hindu city.[114] But, 'for Heaven's sake', he urged the government, 'do not import Punjabis or Pathans'. 'Their presence pollutes the atmosphere', and it was unfair that Bengali tax-payers, 'whether Hindu or Muslim', should

[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] 'Repercussions to the incident at 100 Harrison Road', undated, ibid.
[111] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 21 April 1947.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.

be forced to pay for 'non-Bengali upcountrymen… recruited from the scum of society'.[115] There were 'no dearth of capable Bengalis', many of whom were 'unemployed' and 'starving'. Recruiting Bengali policemen would put a stop to this 'licensed barbarism' as, unlike the polluting Punjabi Muslim, every Bengali 'whatever be his political creed and religious faith, will hang down his head in shame when he finds that his sister is molested and outraged'.[116]

As far as the charge of rape was concerned in the 100 Harrison Road case, Chatterjee insisted that no official enquiries were necessary at all; in fact the public had lost all confidence in such measures 'which cost the poor tax-payers a lot of money and ultimately add to their misery'.[117] This was a direct challenge to the 'sublime' dimensions of the state.[118] Not only was Mahasabha propaganda attacking the police, the state's 'profane' dimension; it was delegitimizing the very instruments through which the modern state maintains its public legitimacy by resurrecting its 'sublime' imaginary - as a repository of justice. The truth of the victim's statements, Chatterjee argued, was self-evident. She was examined by 'the foremost gynaecologist available in this country', 'a gentleman of unimpeachable integrity' and a 'competent judge of human character'.[119] He had testified that the woman was, indeed, molested. But even if this was not proof enough, anyone who would care to interrogate the victim, 'unsophisticated and simple girl that she is', would be convinced of her story. In any case, it was unbelievable that 'a Hindu married girl would concoct a story of her own dis-

[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Thomas Blom Hansen, 'Governance and Myths of State in Mumbai' in Fuller and Benei (eds.), *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*; Also see Thomas Blom Hansen, *Violence in Urban India: Identity Politics, Mumbai and the Post-Colonial City*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
[119] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 21 April 1947.

honour'. Any suggestion that the victim may be lying, in Chatterjee's opinion, was evidence of a 'diseased mind'.[120]

Dr. Bamandas Mukherjee, the doctor who had examined the victim five days after the incident, was also present in the meeting. He urged the Hindus to participate in the 23 April strike for a separate Hindu province as the 'rulers' of Bengal, he declared, had 'turned into oppressors'.[121] The meeting passed a resolution demanding that the Punjabi Muslim police force be disbanded. 'Otherwise', warned Chatterjee, 'Hindus will be compelled to take this menace as a declaration of hostility against them'.[122] In these circumstances, Hindus would have 'no alternative but to come to the conclusion that this is a force which has been manufactured for the purpose of oppression, intimidation and torture'.[123] If this demand was not met, the resolution demanded that Hindu members of the Bengal Legislatures should resign and refuse to cooperate. For cooperation in any form could only mean 'alliance with the powers of evil'.[124] The meeting also urged the Viceroy and the Interim Government to intervene and dismiss the ministry. It asserted that 'Partition or Zonal Ministries' could alone end the torture of Bengali Hindus.[125] Finally, the resolution called upon 'all peace-loving citizens of Calcutta who have any respect for the honour of women and for civil rights' to observe complete *hartal* on 23 April 1947.[126]

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[120] Ibid.
[121] 'Repercussions to the incident at 100 Harrison Road', undated, K.P.M. No. 01820/05; S.B. File No. 938 II, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[122] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 21 April 1947.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.

There were elements of misrepresentation in Chatterjee's speech, especially the claim that no investigating officer had met either the lady in question or her husband. Mr. Hafizzuddin Ahmad, Deputy Commissioner of Police, North Division, testified in Court that he had, in fact, met the couple and arranged for an identification parade at the Jorasanko Police Station.[127] But newspapers openly questioned Ahmad's credentials. *Hindusthan Standard* began by asserting that initial police investigations in criminal cases were usually conducted by the Officer-in-Charge (OC) of the police station which had jurisdiction over the crime scene. 100 Harrison Road fell within Jorasanko police station. Hence, the OC of this *thana* should have initiated the investigations. The fact that it was entrusted to some other officer was in itself a procedural lapse. Because the OC of Jorasanko was a Hindu, the newspaper report alleged that communal considerations were behind the deliberate violation of due process; the government simply wanted to ensure that a Muslim police officer investigated the crime, so that out of communal prejudice he would side with the Punjabi Muslim policemen. It also charged the investigating police officer with corruption, bribery and malpractice, including that he was once caught 'in a place of infamy dancing in company with women of ill-fame'.[128] Whatever may have been the truth in these allegations, such propaganda went uncontested. The Mahasabha leaders tried to convince the Hindu public that the government wanted to sabotage the investigation and protect the culprits.

The strike campaign for 23 April 1947 was supported and generously funded by a large number of Marwari businessmen of Calcutta. On 19 April, they organized a

[127] *Hindusthan Standard*, 20 May 1947.
[128] *Hindusthan Standard*, 21 April 1947.

meeting at the Maheswari Bhawan in Burrabazar, the business area of the city dominated by Marwaris, to discuss how to defend Hindus from the 'new menace'.[129] It proposed that a Hindu volunteer corps should be raised to fight the Punjabi Muslim police force. They promised a sum of rupees twenty-five lakhs to fund this campaign. Sitaram Saksaria, who had previously demonstrated Gandhian leanings, according to police sources, declared that 'Gandhian philosophy must be shelved for the moment'.[130] The meeting also decided to sponsor a social campaign for removing the practice of *purdah* among Hindu women, especially in Marwari families. In fact, they agreed that every Hindu woman had to be 'trained in the use of dagger' for protecting herself.[131] Finally, it sought the help of all parties, especially left-wing parties, to take the initiative in organizing Hindus for self-defence.

The left parties were not slow in responding to the call of these Marwari businessmen. The Forward Bloc took the initiative in organizing a secret meeting of left-wing organizations to consider proposals for setting up a Hindu volunteer body. Representatives of the North Calcutta Forward Bloc, the Socialist Party of India (SPI) and the Revolutionary Socialist Party of India (RSPI) met on 20 April 1947.[132] Referring to the 100 Harrison Road incident, Sohan Lal Misra of the Forward Bloc declared that Calcutta Hindus were helpless and their lives and property were insecure because of the depredations of Punjabi Muslim policemen. The meeting tentatively resolved to raise a secret and underground 'militant organization'; only the name of the 'General

[129] Special Branch report dated 20 April 1947, K.P.M. No. 01820/05; S.B. File No. 938 II, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.

Officer Commanding' would be announced 'for the purpose of issuing the necessary directives to the members of the Corps'.[133]

This was primarily a Forward Bloc proposal; SPI and RSPI did not commit to the programme. This was not because they were against Hindu communal volunteer organizations in principle; they had to seek permission from their respective party leaderships before planning joint action with other (rival) left parties. What happened of the proposals is difficult to tell, but police reports confirmed left-wing initiatives in setting up volunteer organizations in Calcutta for protection of Hindus.[134] The Forward Bloc was the most enthusiastic in this regard. A police note dated 17 April 1947 spoke of Forward Bloc activists visiting riot-prone areas of Calcutta on the pretext of peace missions to organize Hindus to fight Muslims. In Tangra, for example, Forward Bloc party workers allegedly began to collect subscriptions from Hindu residents to raise a Hindu volunteer militia.[135] The Special Branch reported that they had also approached the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha for funds. They were allegedly working in cooperation with Madaripur Jugantar Party activists to procure bombs and explosives for Hindu defence against Muslims.[136]

Other police reports also spoke of a nexus between Hindu communal organizations and the Forward Bloc. The Hindu Seva Sangha, for example, had allegedly employed Sohan Lal Misra of the Forward Bloc on a monthly salary of five hundred rupees,

[133] Ibid.
[134] For an account of the connections between Hindu communal politics and socialist groups in the United Provinces in the late colonial period, see William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
[135] Special Branch Note dated 17 April 1947, K.P.M. No. 01820/05; S.B. File No. 938 II, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[136] Ibid.

provided him with a car, and instructed him to visit communally sensitive areas of Calcutta to collect evidence on Punjabi Muslim police atrocities.[137] Another Hindu organization, the Kashi Visvanath Seva Samiti, was reportedly assisting him in his work.[138] The Burrabazar Branch of SPI had also set up a Volunteer Corps, a police report claimed. A similar ambiguity marked the 'fiery speech' of Ram Manohar Lohia, the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) stalwart, at yet another meeting hosted by Marwari businessmen in Calcutta on 22 April at the same venue in Burrabazar. Commenting on the outrages committed on women in Calcutta (thereby alluding to Punjabi Muslim policemen and the 100 Harrison Road Case), Lohia suggested that 'we should jump upon the *goondas* with a vow either to die or to kill them' rather than 'send wire to the Governor or Viceroy asking for remedy'.[139] Making appeals to government, calling for intervention by the Interim Government, passing resolutions in meetings – all these were 'meaningless' and sign of a 'weak mentality'.[140] 'Either kill or be killed', for there was 'no worse cowardice' than 'witnessing ravages on women'; there was 'no better opportunity' for embracing 'glorious death'.[141] Of course, he insisted, it was not 'a strife between Hindus and Muslims'. However, he warned that under no circumstances was anyone to flee any part of Calcutta, for '[t]o evacuate is to cooperate with Jinnah'.[142] He instructed Hindus to refrain from killing Muslims, as this would also help Jinnah. He further added, 'if the Indian Hindus work in the political field as residents of Hindustan, the problems of Hindustan will be solved, even

[137] 'Miscellaneous: Communal Situation', 8 April 1947, K.P.M. No. 01823/05; S.B. File No. 938 IV, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[138] Ibid.
[139] *Daily Krishak*, 23 April 1947; English translation of the article can be found in K.P.M. No. 01821/05, S.B. File No. 938 II (C), P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.

without the cooperation of the Muslims'.[143] Thus, despite being cloaked in a non-communal rhetoric, Lohia's speech was ultimately directed against Muslims. The '*goondas*' he referred to, who were allegedly outraging women of Calcutta, read contextually, invariably referred to Muslim *goondas*. Delivered one day before the 23 April strike, from a platform sponsored by Marwari financiers of the agitation led by the Mahasabha, one is hardly left with any doubt about the anti-Muslim insinuations in his call for '*goonda* killings'.

Considerable trade union support was forthcoming for the 23 April strike as well. This was, at least in part, because the husband of the victim in the Harrison Road incident was an employee of the telephone department. As a result, the All India Telegraph Union, which represented both telephone and telegraph workers, came out in support of the proposed Hindu Mahasabha *hartal*. On 17 April 1947, the general secretary of the All India Telegraph Union issued a press statement condemning the 'dastardly crime' at 100 Harrison Road and threatened a general suspension of work 'till conditions were such that they [workers] could feel secure and go about their lawful avocations freely'.[144] Members of the union met on 19 April 1947 with Mrinal Kanti Bose of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) as president.[145] The meeting passed a resolution condemning 'the act of lawlessness committed on womanhood at 100 Harrison Road by the guardians of law and order'.[146] Other unions soon joined the agitation. At a meeting on 21 April 1947, the Calcutta Corporation Employees' Association resolved that Corporation workers, other than those in departments deal-

[143] Ibid.
[144] *The Statesman*, 18 April 1947.
[145] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 21 April 1947.
[146] Ibid.

ing with ambulance, maternity homes, dispensaries, water works, pumping stations, burning *ghats* and burial grounds, would observe a one-day strike on 23 April 1947.[147] The same day, the Executive Committee of the Calcutta Chemists' and Druggists' Association came out in support of the strike and resolved to close down medicine markets. With the exception of prescription drugs, members of the Association resolved not to sell medicines on that day.[148] The General Council of the Bengal Provincial Trade Union Congress also adopted a resolution on 19 April 1947 condemning 'excesses' of Pathan and Punjabi police. They decided to postpone a jute workers' strike as it was 'unsafe to launch a general strike in the middle of communal disturbances'.[149] The Central Intelligence Officer of Calcutta also confirmed that bus and taxi drivers had decided to suspend work for the day.[150] Thus, the 23 April strike, sponsored by the Hindu Mahasabha, garnered wide support from labour organizations and trade unions.

The agitation also gained support from Sikh organizations in Calcutta. The Hindu-Sikh Minority Protection Committee, one of the many anti-Muslim volunteer organizations that sprang up in the aftermath of the Calcutta Killing, promised support of the Sikhs for the 23 April strike.[151] A meeting of Sikh leaders held at the Jagat Sudhar Gurdwara on 20 April 1947 adopted a similar resolution.[152] The general secretary of the Sri Guru Singh Sabha released a press statement the same day appealing to the

[147] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 22 April 1947.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Special Branch report titled 'BPTUC', date illegible, K.P.M. No. 01820/05; S.B. File No. 938 II, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[150] Special Branch Report, 22 April 1947, ibid.
[151] Report entitled 'Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha', undated, ibid.
[152] Report entitled 'Singh Sabha', undated, ibid.

Sikhs of Calcutta 'to join all sane elements in condemning *goondaism*'.[153] He urged them to organize a 'non-violent protest' until Muslim *goondas* had left Bengal.[154] Of course, many Sikhs had allied with Hindus even during the Calcutta Killing. But in this agitation against Punjabi Muslim policemen, the stakes of the Sikhs of Calcutta were higher. They were at pains to leave no doubt in the minds of the Hindus that despite being Punjabis themselves, they had no sympathy for Punjabi Muslims. In view of Hindu Mahasabha propaganda easily slipping from an anti-Muslim rhetoric to an anti-non-Bengali rhetoric (as evident from N.C. Chatterjee's speech discussed above), it is unsurprising that the Sikhs were keen to prevent an anti-Punjabi Muslim agitation turning hostile towards Punjabis in general.

The response of the Congress to the call for a strike on 23 April remains the most remarkable. The Hindu Mahasabha had made it clear from the very outset that the final decision about the proposed *hartal* was subject to ratification by the Executive Council of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC).[155] It took the Congress days to finally come out with a statement. When it did, it turned out to be dubious, aimed only at sitting on the fence. The BPCC passed a resolution on 21 April assuring the public that the Executive Committee was aware of 'the intensity of feeling' generated in Calcutta as a result of the 'collapse of law and order'.[156] It said that the Congress had also 'noted' the proposal for the strike. However, the BPCC had previously disapproved of such methods (referring perhaps to Suhrawardy's strike call on the Direct Action Day) and believed that this could 'complicate the already critical

[153] *Hindusthan Standard*, 21 April 1947.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Report entitled 'Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha', undated, K.P.M. No. 01820/05; S.B. File No. 938 II, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[156] *Hindusthan Standard*, 22 April 1947.

communal situation'.[157] The resolution declared that it appreciated the degree of public resentment against the 'general lawlessness' in view of which 'such moves are natural to be initiated'. Thus 'whatever is done in any quarter', the Executive Committee called upon Congress activists and the public at large to preserve peace 'even in the face of grave provocation'.[158] The BPCC was aware, the resolution explained, that 'anti-revolutionary and reactionary forces' were keen to 'put obstacles at the time of peaceful and undivided transference of power'. Thus the Congress felt its obligation to 'organize mass support… to meet every contingency in this critical time' and authorised BPCC President Surendra Mohan Ghosh to 'set up the requisite machinery such as a Council of Action'.[159] This convoluted resolution ensured that the Congress could claim credit for the campaign, project itself as the champion of the 'sufferings of the law abiding and the toiling masses',[160] yet keep its options open for distancing itself from any violence this could precipitate.

Joya Chatterji has argued that during the last months of the Raj, it was the Congress that championed the Hindu cause in Bengal, while the Mahasabha provided the backing. [161] But evidence suggests that the overall complexion of Congress-Mahasabha relation was more symbiotic. While the Congress took the lead in defending Hindu communal interests in the legislative sphere, it largely left the dirty work of actually instigating communal feelings through street campaigns to the Mahasabha. Even if it is true that the Congress, on its own, held the majority of public meetings to

[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, pp. 251-252.

gain public support for Bengal's partition,[162] Mahasabha's anti-Muslim hate campaign on the streets took the issue to a different level altogether. On the one hand, it seems, Congress's agenda was to pose as the cool-headed negotiator; its leaders mainly wanted to generate public support for the legislative part of the partition campaign. The Mahasabha, on the other hand, was allowed to play the role of the rabble-rouser. Both could take credit for whatever this lethal cocktail of communal combination managed to achieve.

The strike on 23 April 1947 was a considerable success, especially in Hindu dominated areas.[163] Shops, markets, cinemas and educational institutions remained shut. Employees of banks and mercantile offices stayed away from their workplaces, while attendance in government offices remained thin. Some factories in Khidderpore area remained closed and workers in Ordnance Depots and the Corporation in North Calcutta refused to work. Taxis, rickshaws and carts did not come out onto the streets, while buses operated on very few routes. Although trams ran on some routes in the morning, these were soon withdrawn due to 'public interference'.[164] At some places, large crowds took to the streets. Instances of brickbat-throwing took place on a large scale. A bomb exploded on Vivekananda Road. The police made a few arrests and fired tear gas shells, injuring some protesters. It was business as usual, however, in Muslim-majority areas of the city, hampered only by the scarcity of transport.[165]

[162] Ibid., p. 251.
[163] 'Miscellaneous: Hartal on 23 April 1947', 24 April 1947, ibid.
[164] Ibid.
[165] SRPSB, second half of April 1947, L/PJ/5/154, IOR.

In this campaign, justice for the woman whom the policemen had allegedly raped took a back seat. This issue became a mere pawn in the larger Hindu campaign for Bengal's partition. The fallout was a widening of the communal fissure in Calcutta even further. It hammered the last nail in the coffin of whatever public enthusiasm the United Bengal scheme had managed to generate. Whatever little balm it may have been able to administer to the communal wound in Bengal, the anti-Muslim propaganda that accompanied the partition campaign successfully washed it away. The Punjabi Muslim police – now the symbol of Muslim oppression – became the locus around which this communal discourse in Bengal came to be framed. In this discourse, partition of the province on communal lines came to be projected as the only escape the Hindus had from physical annihilation under Muslim rule. It remained so until 3 June 1947, when the British government announced its decision to partition Bengal.

Punjabi Muslim Policemen and the Partition of Bengal

Propaganda against Punjabi Muslim policemen never died out after the 23 April strike. The issue was kept alive by recurrent reports of Punjabi policemen allegedly raping Hindu women. On 7 May 1947, for example, the *Hindusthan Standard* reported that two armed Punjabi Muslim policemen had 'criminally trespassed' into a house on Canal Circular Road, confined the residents into a balcony at gunpoint and raped a thirty-year-old widow.[166] Even when the culprits were caught, newspaper reports alleged that the guilty policemen were simply confined to their barracks without ar-

[166] *Hindusthan Standard*, 9 May 1947; *Hindusthan Standard*, 21 May 1947.

rest.[167] The Hindu Mahasabha claimed that Punjabi Muslim policemen were hand in glove with League activists who had orders from its High Command to kill Hindus. Besides conducting house-raids, Mahasabha leaders asserted, Punjabi Muslim policemen were kidnapping Hindus from the streets and handing over to Muslim National Guard volunteers and Muslim League relief workers. They were then taken to a secret location and slaughtered.[168] Furthermore, Mahasabha propagandists alleged that Muslim League relief workers roamed around in communally mixed neighbourhoods, threw bombs and crackers themselves and implicated Hindu residents by giving false evidence to the police.[169] In a similar vein, a leaflet claiming to solve the 'Mystery of Disappearance of Arrested Persons in Calcutta'[170] declared that the Punjabi policemen randomly arrested Hindus on the plea of violating curfew orders, handed them over to 'murder gangs' in slaughter houses, where the unfortunate victims were butchered, chopped into small pieces, packed in wooden crates and sent outside the city 'for an unknown destination'.[171] The author of the leaflet advised Hindus that the best way to deal with Punjabi Muslim policemen when they came to make an arrest was to kill them at once. If that was not possible, they should run away. If they felt trapped, they should immediately raise an alarm and seek assistance from other Hindus.[172]

[167] Confidential diary entry by Sub-Inspector Pramatha Chakraborty, 9 May 1947, K.P.M. No. 01821/05; File No. 938/47 II (C), P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[168] 'Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha', 20 April 1947, K.P.M. No. 01820/05; S.B. File No. 938 II, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Anonymous leaflet, title illegible, undated, K.P.M. No. 01823/05; S.B. File No. 938 IV, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid.

By the middle of May 1947, Syama Prasad Mookerjee was directly addressing the press warning Hindus of the Bengal ministry's attempts at recruiting more Muslims from the Punjab into Calcutta's armed police. Despite posing as a 'believer in the solidarity of the Hindu race and in the need for a sovereign and united Bengal', Mookerjee warned, Suhrawardy had dispatched recruiting parties to the Punjab countryside, and had already enlisted two hundred more of such Punjabi Muslims for Calcutta Police.[173] He hoped that this would finally open the eyes of those Hindus who were still 'fraternizing with the Muslim League and Mr. Suhrawardy' and attempting to 'purchase peace for Bengali Hindus' by indulging in 'unholy pacts and negotiations' – referring, of course, to the supporters of the United Bengal movement.[174] On 20 May 1947, Mookerjee issued another press statement. He asserted that the Hindu Mahasabha had now received confirmation not only that the Bengal ministry was recruiting more Punjabi Muslims for the armed police of both Bengal and Calcutta, but that the ministry had instructed recruiters to ensure that the new men were brought to the province by 2 June 1947, the expected date for the British government's announcement on India's future.[175] Thus, in case the British Government agreed to partition Bengal, a massive riot would follow. Mookerjee asked the Viceroy, the Home Member and the Governor to 'intervene immediately' and 'prevent further complications'.[176]

The Muslim League and the various organizations under its umbrella, as well as the League-leaning press, remained defensive all through the campaign. Until the 100

[173] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 May 1947.
[174] Ibid.
[175] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 20 May 1947.
[176] Ibid.

Harrison Road Case came to light, some League newspapers expressed open support for Suhrawardy's police recruitment policy. An article published in early April 1947 in *Azad*, for example, asserted that the newly-recruited Punjabi Muslim policemen were, in fact, completely non-partisan and non-communal; the Hindus hated them as they feared that their neutrality would frustrate the Hindu conspiracy to exterminate the Muslims of Calcutta – the city where the Muslims were a minority. It declared that the handful of Punjabi Muslims already serving in Calcutta Police was thoroughly inadequate and demanded that at least a few thousand more of such policemen be brought in to tackle the increasing difficulty of administering 'the Great City of the East'.[177] With time, as the Hindu campaign against the Punjabi Muslim police became louder, open defence of such policemen became difficult. League propaganda increasingly adopted a defensive posture.[178] Instead of contradicting the Mahasabha-led campaign, it attempted to bring out counter-examples of Muslims being harassed by Hindu policemen, especially the Gurkha armed police. In a localized outbreak of violence in Beliaghata in early April 1947, for example, local Muslims blamed the 'alleged partiality of the Gurkha Armed police picket' for the murder of an Imam, desecration of a mosque and destruction of the tomb of a *pir*.[179] They demanded that Gurkha policemen be replaced by Punjabi Muslims or Pathans.[180] An organization by the name of Anjuman-e-Mufidul Islam sprang up, again in early April, to register Muslim complaints against 'police excesses'.[181] While a section of the Muslim League blamed Suhrawardy for 'Hindu appeasement' and failing to protect Mus-

[177] *Azad*, 8 April 1947.
[178] See 'Miscellaneous: Communal Situation in Calcutta', 5 April 1947, K.P.M. No. 01820/05; S.B. File No. 938 II, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[179] Communal Situation in Calcutta, 9 April 1947, ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] *Azad*, 9 April 1947; Report of Inspector A.G. Khan, 25 April 1947, K.P.M. No. 01820/05; S.B. File No. 938 II, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP. Confidential diary entry from Inspector A.G. Khan, 25 April 1947; K.P.M. No. 01821/05; File No. 938/47 II (C), P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.

lims,[182] others blamed Hindus and their organizations for keeping the tension high in order to discredit the ministry and strengthen their campaign for the partition of Bengal.[183]

By the end of May 1947, Calcutta was rife with rumours of communal trouble on 2 June 1947. On the eve of Mountbatten's declaration of 3 June 1947, stipulating the future shape of India and Bengal after British withdrawal, both Hindus and Muslims anticipated a violent communal conflagration in Calcutta.[184] Rumours circulated in Muslim-majority areas of the city that Hindu Mahasabha was collecting arms and planning a concerted attack on Muslims if the demand for Bengal's partition was not conceded. However, if Bengal was partitioned, officers of the Calcutta Police predicted a bout of anti-Hindu violence. They were convinced that Muslims would not 'concede Calcutta to the Hindus without a fight'.[185] Police informers reported that Muslim families in Calcutta were stocking up food for at least a fortnight, and that secret meetings were being held in all Muslim dominated areas 'almost everyday for defence and offence'.[186]

Yet, the campaign for Bengal Partition championed by the Mahasabha and the Bengal Congress was so systematic and vigorous, both in the realms of formal politics as well as in the domain of street agitations, that for many weeks before the 3 June

[182] Special Branch Notes, undated, K.P.M. No. 01820/05; S.B. File No. 938 II, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP; 'Communal Situation in Calcutta', 15 April 1947, ibid.
[183] Statement of a Special Branch Secret Agent: 'Communal Situation in the City', 21 May 1947, K.P.M. No. 01823/05; S.B. File No. 938 IV, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[184] Ibid. Also see 'D.C. North's information regarding a Muslim outburst before 2 June 1947, ibid; Syamaprasad Mookerjee's press statement in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 20 May 1947.
[185] Ibid.
[186] 'Muslim Affairs: Apprehension of Trouble on 2 June 1947', K.M.P. No. 01824/05, S.B. File No. 938V, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.

announcement the partition of the province seemed like a foregone conclusion. Despite all the rumours of preparation for protesting the loss of Calcutta with violence, Muslims of the city seemed to have lost heart and were reconciled to the success of the Hindu campaign. Of course, there were Muslim League leaders who, despite initial protests about losing dominance over Calcutta, were not particularly unhappy about letting it go, such as those who wanted Dacca to be the centre of Bengal politics in Pakistan. But for many Muslim families of Calcutta, the partition of Bengal and allocation of Calcutta to a partitioned India, meant a prolonged period of uncertainty. They had to renegotiate their position within a new political environment that would certainly be hostile to those Muslims who would choose to remain in the city. They knew that in the new scheme of things, they would certainly have to negotiate their place in the city from a position of weakness rather than of strength. As the events of the following years confirmed, their apprehensions did not prove to be unfounded.

Conclusion

This chapter intended to illuminate the nature of popular mobilization for Bengal's partition in Calcutta. Control over Calcutta had shaped the Pakistan demand even at the all-India level. The Muslim League claimed it as an intrinsic part of Pakistan. On the other hand, many Hindus saw Calcutta as the centre of their culture and politics only recently contaminated by Muslims as a result of the exigencies of electoral politics. Therefore, they claimed a historical right over the city and argued for its severance from the Muslim-majority areas of Bengal. Agitation in the city's streets, therefore, constituted a major part of the partition campaign in Bengal. The figure of the newly recruited Punjabi Muslim policemen provided a symbol around which the

campaign consolidated itself. The 100 Harrison Road Case gave the pro-Partition propagandists, championed by leaders of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, an opportunity to delegitimize the authority of the provincial government. They represented the regime under Suhrawardy as a foretaste of 'Muslim tyranny'[187] to which Hindus would be subjected if the whole of Bengal was allowed to pass into the hands of Pakistan.

The United Bengal movement, which many historians have celebrated as a non-communal alternative to India's Partition, failed to carry the day when faced with this vigorous campaign for Bengal's partition. Yet, a part of the blame must lie with the intrinsic lack of legitimacy of leaders of the campaign. It became too easy for the Partition campaign to project the United Bengal movement as the last attempt of failed leaders to hold on to the reins of power. As one contemporary observer remarked: 'Thus [United Bengal] plan has two authors – one has no past, Shaheed Suhrawardy, the other has no future, Sarat Chandra Bose. Their commodity has, therefore, no market.'[188]

But more than anything else, the street campaigns during this period, represented an acute crisis of state power. In the perception of large numbers of Bengali Hindus, not only had the everyday state degenerated into a machine of 'Hindu oppression', but those institutions which could intervene to protect them and deliver justice had also collapsed. It now seemed useless to appeal to other 'higher authorities' to intervene on

[187] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*.
[188] P S Mathur, 'Sovereign Bengal', *Hindusthan Standard*, 2 and 3 August 1945. Quoted in Gordon, *Brothers Against the Raj*, p. 578. The statement was made by Altaf Hussain, whom Mathur quoted in his article.

their behalf. Even Calcutta's Muslims seemed to have given up the battle for protecting their socio-economic and political position in the city even before the British government finally announced the decision to partition Bengal. This exemplified the peculiar nature of decolonization as a moment of transition of state power.

Chapter 5

The Nation-State and its Muslim Minority in Calcutta

Attlee's announcement of 3 June 1947 transformed inter-community relations dramatically.[1] The Partition of the subcontinent became a settled fact; on 15 August 1947, British India was destined to be partitioned into two sovereign nation-states – India and Pakistan. The announcement also settled the fate of Calcutta. It was to become the provincial capital of a Hindu-majority West Bengal and join the Indian Union.

The police in Calcutta expected an immediate outbreak of communal violence.[2] But rather than resist, the Muslims seemed to have reconciled themselves to their destiny. They either left for Pakistan or accepted a life of a religious minority. While most rich and influential Muslims left for Pakistan, a large number of poorer Muslims stayed behind. Deprived of patronage and protection from their powerful co-religionists, the latter were reduced to a position of acute vulnerability. This chapter aims to delineate the processes of marginalization that rendered Calcutta's Muslims vulnerable, not just to the tyranny of their Hindu rivals, but also to the state machinery that the latter came, very quickly, to dominate.

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[1] For the announcement on 3 June 1947 see 'Statement by His Majesty's Government, dated the 3rd June 1947', *Partition Proceedings* (6 vols.), New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1949, vol. I, p. 2. See Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 20.

[2] Statement of a Special Branch Secret Agent: 'Communal Situation in the City', 21 May 1947, K.P.M. No. 01823/05; S.B. File No. 938 IV, P.M. (1947), Special Branch Records, Calcutta Police (henceforth, SBR, CP).

Earlier chapters have argued that decolonization in the subcontinent needs to be understood as a crisis in the way the late colonial state came to be imagined in quotidian life. These have tried to show that despite attempts by the government to sustain a sublime image of the colonial state, popular politics and everyday encounters with agencies of the local state repeatedly reduced it only to its profane dimensions.[3] After 3 June, the new leaders preparing to take over the reins of administration realised that if the institutions of the post-colonial state had to command authority, they needed to resurrect the state's sublime imaginary – those dimensions of state power they had themselves delegitimized in the past by mobilizing their followers against the government. But this was no easy task. They had to be careful not to compromise their dominance in their effort at reinstating the idea of an impartial, benevolent and just state. This required an immediate readjustment of social relations, which, in turn, required the subordination of 'internal enemies'. Muslims who stayed back became the internal enemy *par excellence*.[4]

The predicament of Indian Muslims after partition became a subject of scholarship rather late in the day. Beginning in the 1990s, against the backdrop of a resurgence of

[3] For a discussion on the distinction between 'sublime' and 'profane' dimensions of the state, see Thomas Blom Hansen, 'Governance and Myths of State in Mumbai' in C.J. Fuller and Véronique Bénéï (eds.), *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, London: Hurst, 2001, pp. 31-67; also see Thomas Blom Hansen, *Violence in Urban India: Identity Politics, Mumbai and the Post-Colonial City*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

[4] For a discussion of how Indian Muslims emerged as 'internal enemies' *par excellence* after partition, see Gyanendra Pandey, 'Can a Muslim be an Indian?', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 41, no. 4, October 1999, pp. 608-29. For a discussion on the contradiction posed between 'Bengali' and 'Muslim' identities in Bengal, see Joya Chatterji, 'The Bengali Muslim: A Contradiction in Terms? An Overview of the Debate on Bengali Muslim Identity', *Comparative Studies in South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1996, pp. 16-24.

communal violence, this scholarship was dominated, with a few notable exceptions,[5] by political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists. What emerged was a sophisticated literature on communal violence,[6] Hindu right-wing politics[7] and secularism.[8] But these works paid little attention to the period of transition between the last days of the Raj and the immediate aftermath of partition. This period, this chapter will argue, was crucial to the making of the post-colonial Indian state as well as to the position of Muslim minorities within the polity.

[5] One of the most influential historical studies of the 1990s on the fate of Muslim minorities after Partition was by Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence*, London: Hurst & Company, 1997.

[6] Some of the most influential works on communal violence in independent India since the 1990s include Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001; Veena Das (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992; Paul R. Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997; Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, London: University of Washington Press, 2003; Paul R. Brass, *Forms of Collective Violence: Riots, Pogroms and Genocide in Modern India*, New Delhi: Three Essays Collective, 2006; Asghar Ali Engineer, *Communal Riots after Independence: A Comprehensive Account*, Delhi: Shipra, 2004; Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002; Ornit Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism: The Violence in Gujarat*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

[7] Thomas Blom Hansen and Christophe Jaffrelot (eds.), *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998; Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s: Strategies of State Building, Implantation and Mobilization (With Specific Reference to Central India*), London: Hurst & Company, 1993; Peter Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalisms: Hindus and Muslims in India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994; Ornit Shani, 'The Rise of Hindu Nationalism in India: The Case Study of Ahmedabad in the 1980s', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2005, pp. 681-96.

[8] Perhaps the most influential collection of essays on secularism in the 1990s was Rajeev Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and its Critics*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998; Other influential studies on Indian secularism include William Gould, 'Contesting "Secularism" in Colonial and Postcolonial North India between the 1930s and 1950s', *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2005, pp. 481-94; Achin Vanaik, *The Furies of Indian Communalism: Religion, Modernity and Secularization*, London: Verso, 1997; Rochana Bajpai, *Debating Difference: Group Rights and Liberal Democracy in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011; Taylor C. Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India: Negotiating Citizenship in Postcolonial Hyderabad*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Also see the recent collection of essays: Humeira Iqtidar and Tanika Sarkar (eds.), 'Revisiting Secularisation' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Issue, vol. 48, no. 50, 14 December 2013.

Since the early 2000s, historians have begun studying the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial period in South Asia systematically.[9] A group of scholars have described this process as a transition from subjecthood to citizenship.[10] This chapter hopes to engage in a dialogue with this body of scholarship, with a shared concern about how the everyday state shaped the quotidian experience of citizenship for marginalized groups. However, it focuses more narrowly on the period of interregnum when ideas of *both* subjecthood and citizenship were in a state of flux. After the 3 June announcement, the status of Indians as colonial subjects began to give way to an anticipation of national citizenship. Yet these would-be citizens only had a faint idea about what precisely Indian citizenship would look like. Their position can best be described as a state of being 'neither subject nor citizen'. This chapter will argue that this was a decisive moment when the relationship between the state and its future citizens was redefined.

[9] Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition*; Gyanesh Kudaisya, *Region, Nation, "Heartland": Uttar Pradesh in India's Body Politic*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006; Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Decolonization in South Asia: Meanings of Freedom in Post-Independence West Bengal, 1947-52*, London; New York: Routledge, 2009; Taylor C. Sherman, 'The Integration of the Princely State of Hyderabad and the Making of Postcolonial India, 1948-56', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2007, pp. 1358-88; Taylor C. Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India*, London: Routledge, 2010; Sarah Ansari, *Life After Partition: Migration, Community and Strife in Sindh, 1947-1962*, Karachi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; William Gould, *Bureaucracy, Community and Influence: Society and the State in India, 1930-1960s*, London: Routledge, 2011; William Gould, *Religion and Conflict in Modern South Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

[10] Taylor C. Sherman, William Gould, and Sarah Ansari (eds.), *From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947-1970*, Delhi; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014; William Gould, Taylor C. Sherman, and Sarah Ansari, 'The Flux of the Matter: Loyalty, Corruption and the "Everyday State" in Post-Partition Government Services of India and Pakistan', *Past and Present*, vol. 291, no. 1, May 2013, pp. 247-53. There is also a growing literature on citizenship in India. See Joya Chatterji, 'South Asian Histories of Citizenship, 1947-1970', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2012, pp. 1049-71; Ornit Shani, 'Conceptions of Citizenship in India and the "Muslim Question"', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 44, no. 1, January 2010, pp. 145-173.

The fate of Muslims who stayed back in Calcutta is potentially a richly productive site for this investigation. But unfortunately the subject has not received adequate attention from scholars. Among the small corpus of literature that exists, Joya Chatterji's work stands out as the most important and detailed exposition on the subject.[11] Chatterji's discussion of Muslim minority formation is structured by her parallel concern with refugees. Thus, Muslims who 'stayed on' in West Bengal stand in contrast to the Hindu refugees who 'moved'. The underlying conceptual framing of the theme, therefore, reflects her ongoing concerns with migration (or 'staying on') and mobility (or immobility). This framing also structures the way in which the process of Muslim marginalization is analysed. In Chatterji's work, the contest is over space, with Hindus (especially Hindu refugees) grabbing the space (both physical and cultural) that Muslims had occupied in the days before partition. The state makes an appearance, but mainly serves as a backdrop.

This chapter, on the other hand, puts the local state apparatus at the centre stage in the analysis. It argues that the marginalization of Calcutta's Muslim minorities cannot be understood without taking the priorities and intervention of state agencies seriously.

This chapter will begin with an account of the way Hindu '*goonda*' gangs were dealt with by the new state-in-the-making. The next section will discuss the tropes through which Hindu groups and their media articulated their anti-Muslim prejudice

[11] Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition*, pp. 159-208. Joya Chatterji, 'Of Graveyards and Ghettos: Muslims in Partitioned West Bengal, 1947-1967' in Mushirul Hasan and Asim Roy (eds.), *Living Together Separately: Cultural India in History and Politics*, New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 222-49.

in the days after partition, justifying, indeed pushing for, the subordination of the Muslim minority under the new regime. The last section will describe how the new state machinery dealt with Muslim minorities and the changes this brought about in the latter's self-representation.

Hindu '*Goondas*' and the Miracle of the Mahatma

Communal fractures within Bengal's high politics had deepened since the Communal Award and the Government of India Act of the 1930s. By the time tensions became acute after the Cabinet Mission Plan in July 1946, hostilities had opened up between the Hindu and Muslim masses in their respective neighbourhoods in Calcutta. Communally-aligned criminal gangs – '*goondas*' in official parlance, but also described in colonial sources quite interchangeably as 'bad characters', '*badmashes*', 'hooligans' and a range of similar categories[12] – emerged as defenders of community interests. Gang leaders frequently had close ties with important public figures in the world of formal politics. After 1947, if the restructured machinery of the new nation-state was to take root in the city, both Hindu and Muslim gangs of the Calcutta underworld had to be controlled. But this had different implications for Hindu and Muslim gangs respectively.

[12] India and Burma Committee – Indian Political Situation: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for India, 15 August 1945, Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon (eds.), *The Transfer of Power, 1942-47: Constitutional Relations between Britain and India*, vol. VI, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1976, no. 28, pp. 70-71. Also see Suranjan Das and J.K. Ray, *The Goondas: Towards a Reconstruction of the Calcutta Underworld*, Calcutta: Firma K.L.M., 1996; Suranjan Das, 'The "Goondas": Towards a Reconstruction of the Calcutta Underworld through Police Records', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 29, no. 44, 29 October 1994, pp. 2877-2883.

Independence and partition involved a radical restructuring of power relations in Bengal. Muslim politicians now had to pack up, bag and baggage; or they had to try to reinvent themselves. Most leaders chose to leave Calcutta. Those who stayed behind had to function in very difficult circumstances and refashion their politics as per the needs of the hour. They had to prioritise reconciliation with the new, largely 'Hindu', leadership above championing 'Muslim' interests. The Muslim leadership of Calcutta was, in a sense, a defeated leadership which had to vacate and hand over effective power to the leaders of the Hindus. At a stroke, Calcutta's Muslims lost the position of dominance they had previously enjoyed in this Muslim-minority city. Muslim *goonda* gangs not only lost their patrons but also their strength as the muscle-power of the politically dominant community. Excluded from patronage and protection, the Muslim underclass was left vulnerable to the depredations of the law-enforcing machinery of the new, overwhelmingly Hindu, government of West Bengal.

Even more ominously, these gangs were now exposed to the wrath of various Hindu gangs who saw opportunities in the changed circumstances to settle old scores. This involved teaching 'lessons' to those *goonda* gangs who had acted as protectors of Muslims in 1946. In these 'pedagogic' acts of violence, Hindu gangs expected the support of the new administration, now run by their old patrons.

For the government, however, this meant trouble. As leaders of the opposition, they had used the Calcutta underworld to their advantage when it suited them. Now that their objective of securing a territory over which they could rule had been achieved, outlaws previously under their protection had to be made to mutate into law-abiding citizens. The point is not that they were particularly concerned with the

fate of Muslims who decided to embrace Indian citizenship. But outbreaks of communal violence could now delegitimize their claim to govern the new province. They had to act as impartial guardians of a secular nation-state, or at least create the impression of so doing.

The task of demobilizing this subterranean world of crime was difficult and dangerous. There was the obvious danger of the Hindu *goondas* turning against them. The law and order machinery was not ready to cope with challenges of this sort, particularly since it, too, was in the process of being divided. Peace could best be accomplished through gentle persuasion rather than heavy-handed action.

Remarkably, it was Mahatma Gandhi, the champion of the politics of moral persuasion, who stepped in to fulfil this mission. Hindu politicians from Bengal who had previously used Hindu *goondas* for their vested interests in the past did not have the moral authority to perform this delicate task. The few Muslim leaders who remained hailed the Mahatma's intervention.[13] It was their last hope of securing some protection for the lives and properties of Muslims in the city. If it went well, Muslim leaders could even hope to improve their public standing in the new order by huddling under the Mahatma's umbrella.

Gandhi's relationship with Bengal was a troubled one. Since the days of the Swadeshi movement, Bengal had been the nerve-centre of extremist politics, a herit-

[13] Manubehn Gandhi, *The Miracle of Calcutta* (tr. Gopalrao Kulkarni), Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1959, pp. 19-20.

age widely cherished by its people.[14] Gandhian ideals of non-violence had far less popular appeal here than in many other parts of India. In the domain of Congress politics, moreover, Gandhi had always faced stiff resistance from Bengal.[15] In the 1920s, Chittaranjan Das had led the Swarajist opposition to his leadership of the Congress, together with Motilal Nehru.[16] In the 1930s, as the prevailing mood within the Bengal Congress became more inward-looking, Gandhi, as the central figure of the Congress High Command, became the object of opposition for a range of powerful leaders committed to Bengal's provincial interests.[17] His reputation was further damaged when in 1939, at the annual session of the Indian National Congress at Tripuri, he forced Subhas Bose to resign from the position of Congress President.[18] Gandhi's opposition to Bose was seen as proof of the High Command's disregard for Bengal's interests. In the following years, the central Congress leadership attempted to weed out opposition from within the Bengal Provincial Congress,[19] but it did not help improve their public standing in the province. Gandhi, however, decided to make Bengal, which had never really embraced him, the theatre of his experiments in communal harmony. In October 1946, when Noakhali in eastern Bengal went up in flames,

[14] Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973.
[15] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided.*
[16] Rajat Kanta Ray, *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflict of Interest in Calcutta City Politics, 1875-1939*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1979; Rajat Kanta Ray, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal, 1875-1927*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984; Tanika Sarkar, *Bengal, 1928-1934: The Politics of Protest*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; Gitasree Bandyopadhyay, *Constraints in Bengal Politics, 1921-41: Gandhian Leadership*, Calcutta: Sarat Book House, 1984.
[17] Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; Leonard Gordon, *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement, 1876-1940*, New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1974.
[18] Leonard Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj: A Biography of Indian Nationalists Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990; Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011.
[19] Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*.

Gandhi decided to dedicate himself personally to restoring peace by making Noakhali his home for several weeks.[20]

In August 1947, Gandhi was merely passing through Calcutta on his way to Noakhali. But on 9 August, when he arrived in the city, it was already in the grip of communal violence.[21] Ever since the Calcutta riots of 1946, the city had scarcely known respite from communal killings. Rumours, stabbings and localized outbreaks of violence had kept the fires burning. Mobilizations around the Hindu demand for Bengal's partition on the streets of the city had only aggravated this tense atmosphere. The 3 June announcement seemed to have brought about a ceasefire, but this was the lull before a storm. Hope of a return to 'normalcy' soon vanished. Official statistics of communal casualties in the city, invariably conservative, soared. By July, they had returned to the levels of violence witnessed in May, before the 3 June announcement. (See Table 4.1)

[20] Rakesh Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine to Noakhali, 1943-47*, New Delhi; London: Sage, 2005; Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991; Anwesha Roy, 'Making Riots, Making Peace: Communalism, Communal Riots and Anti-Communal Resistance in Bengal, 1941-47', PhD Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2015.

[21] Gandhi, *The Miracle of Calcutta*, p. 17; Apart from Manubehn's account, there are two other important sources on Gandhi's stay in Calcutta in August–September 1947: Nirmal Kumar Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*, Calcutta: Nishana, 1953; Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, Part II, Volume X, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1958.

Period (1947)	Communal Incidents	Killed	Injured
Second Half of May	278	37	304
First Half of June	58	15	44
Second Half of June	193	41	170
First Half of July	230	50	246
Second Half of July	166	33	180

Table 4.1: Data for Communal Incidents in Calcutta, Government of Bengal. Compiled from Secret Reports on the Political Situation in Bengal (Fortnightly Reports) for the respective periods, India Office Records, L/PJ/5/154, Year 1947, British Library.

While in Calcutta, Gandhi stayed at his *ashram* in Sodepur. It was here that Suhrawardy and Muhammad Usman, two Muslim League stalwarts widely held by the Hindus to have orchestrated the Great Calcutta Killing, met the Mahatma and pleaded for help. They begged Gandhi not to leave for Noakhali immediately, but to stay back in Calcutta to restore peace between Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi agreed

on the condition that Suhrawardy would personally ensure that Noakhali remained peaceful.[22]

On 13 August 1947, Gandhi arrived at Haidari Mansion in Beliaghata, an area in north Calcutta in which all Muslims had either been killed or driven away.[23] Tempers ran high; but, all of a sudden, peace returned to the city on the eve of independence. Hindus and Muslims visited areas they had not been able to enter since the days of the Killing; they embraced and congratulated each other in excitement.[24] This, Manubehn tells us, was Gandhi's 'first miracle'.[25]

Things went well for the next couple of weeks, with Gandhi and Suhrawardy addressing evening prayer meetings all over Calcutta and its suburbs. Satisfied with the prevailing mood of communal harmony, on 31 August, Gandhi announced his decision to proceed to Noakhali. Later that night, communal violence broke out all over Calcutta. Allegedly started by Sikhs to avenge violence in the Punjab, Calcutta woke on 1 September 1947 to widespread killing, looting and arson.

In response, Gandhi decided to begin a fast which, he declared, would end either with the return of peace or with his death. The violence raged for the next two days, but by 4 September, a tentative calm began to return. The Mahatma had managed to cast his spell, his chroniclers tell us, on both Hindus and Muslims: rioters from both

[22] Gandhi, *The Miracle of Calcutta*, p. 19. See the entry for 11-12 August 1947.
[23] Ibid., p. 21. See entry for 13 August 1947.
[24] For a description of the rejoicing in Calcutta on 15 August 1947, see Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Decolonization in South Asia*, pp. 9-17; also see Jim Masselos, '"The Magic Touch of Being Free": The Rituals of Independence on 15 August' in Jim Masselos (ed.), *India: Creating a Modern Nation*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1990, pp. 37-53.
[25] Gandhi, *The Miracle of Calcutta*.

communities fell at his feet and asked for forgiveness. Hindu *goondas* lined up to surrender their arms to Gandhi. Leaders across party lines signed a pledge assuring Gandhi that they would personally ensure peace in Calcutta and that, should another riot break out, they would fight it with their own lives. Satisfied at the 'change of hearts', Gandhi broke his fast the same day, after addressing his evening prayers. Having accomplished the 'miracle of Calcutta', Gandhi left for Delhi on 7 September 1947.

Chroniclers of these events, who are mostly hagiographers of Gandhi, end the story here. With the successful disarming of Calcutta's underworld, a year-long saga of relentless violence apparently gave way, under the Mahatma's spell, to an era of peace in this riot-torn city. This remains the dominant narrative even today, which has now been institutionalized in the official memory of the city.[26] Every year on 15 August, the anniversary of India's freedom from British rule is celebrated in Calcutta with a dramatic performance re-enacting the arms surrender at Haidari Mansion.[27] The Police Museum in Calcutta has also ceremoniously put up the surrendered arms for public display.

Two features in this dramatic episode require attention. The first was the fact that Gandhi's 'miracle' was predicated on a public and performative acceptance of defeat on the part of Muslims. Suhrawardy, the ex-Premier of Bengal, declared himself personally guilty of orchestrating the Great Calcutta Killing in August 1946 at a mob trial, an admission extracted from him on the threat of being publicly lynched. While

[26] For a discussion of institutional memory, see Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', *Representations*, no. 26, Spring 1989, pp. 7-24.
[27] Archivists at the Police Museum in Calcutta informed me of this annual performance. Unfortunately, I have been unable to witness this in person.

Manubehn's account, aimed at demonstrating the 'miracles' that Mahatma was capable of, sanitizes the event to the point that Suhrawardy's 'confession' comes across as a voluntary 'change of heart',[28] Pyarelal's account is more revealing. We learn that Gandhi had not dared to bring Suhrawardy to his evening prayer on 14 August 1947 as he was reluctant to give the crowd 'the slightest cause for irritation'.[29] Upon learning that Suhrawardy had locked himself up inside the Haidari Mansion, an angry mob attacked the building, pelting stones at the window. Suhrawardy remained 'impassive, muttering sardonic remarks about the young men outside'.[30] It was Gandhi who pacified the crowd, telling them that Suhrawardy was 'engaged in breaking the Ramzan fast', and that he would soon appear before them.[31] When the crowd temporarily calmed down, Gandhi 'beckoned' Suhrawardy to his side. One man in the crowd asked Suhrawardy whether he was responsible for the Great Calcutta Killing. Suhrawardy remarked, 'Yes, we all are'. But the mob did not relent, pushing threateningly until Suhrawardy admitted, 'Yes, it was my responsibility'.[32] Thus, far from a spontaneous confession of his sins, brought about by his apparent 'change of heart', Suhrawardy was forced into an admission of guilt in the face of mob violence.

But Pyarelal, too, was invested in projecting the Mahatma's greatness. He concluded that this 'unequivocal, straight and candid confession … by one who had made arrogance and haughtiness his badge and never known humility', apparently had 'a profound effect on the crowd'.[33] Gandhi had later said, Pyarelal tells us, that he could

[28] Gandhi, *The Miracle of Calcutta*, pp. 25-26.
[29] Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, p. 368.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., p. 369.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.

sense that this had a 'cleansing effect'.[34] But that was not all; after that, Suhrawardy went on a public campaign to urge Calcutta's Muslims to surrender to Hindu coercion 'willingly'. At Gandhi's evening prayer on 15 August 1947, when communal tension in the city had supposedly melted away, Suhrawardy observed that Hindus were forcing Muslims to shout 'Jai Hind'. But, he declared, there was no need for force any more: 'We shall shout that slogan of our free will, for we too are residents of India.'[35] Thereafter, in every public meeting, Suhrawardy's messages to Muslims were to shout 'Jai Hind' and to 'unite' under India's flag. At another prayer meeting at Tollygunge on 29 September 1947, Suhrawardy told Muslims: 'If you want to live as inhabitants of Hindustan you must accept the Tri-colour as your national flag and salute it.'[36] His signal, therefore, was clear; the only way Muslims could manage to survive was by submitting themselves 'willingly' to the demands of the Indian state and its Hindu public. Suhrawardy's advice for Muslims was to crawl when, or even before, they were asked to bend.

The second aspect that needs attention is this: Gandhi's effort was not just to restore communal peace, but also to legitimize state institutions, including the police, now that the nation-state was attempting to stabilize itself. While his advice to policemen was to 'serve' the people and not 'rule' over them, and to be impartial, Gandhi urged the public to submit to the police. He told the congregation at one of his prayer meetings that the police 'received orders from the Government, not from private individuals' and that it was their duty 'to arrest all those who commit crimes'.[37]

[34] Ibid.
[35] Gandhi, *The Miracle of Calcutta*, p. 28.
[36] Ibid., p. 51.
[37] Ibid., p. 32.

Even historians who are otherwise critical of nationalist historiography have lauded Gandhi's efforts in the last days of his life and his complete disdain for power. Sumit Sarkar, for example, writes that it was at this time that Gandhi's true greatness was revealed by his courage to 'stand against the tide' and his 'total disdain for all conventional forms of power which could have been his for the asking now that India was becoming free'.[38] But one must not miss the point that, even though Gandhi remained aloof from struggles over power and position in Delhi, his mission nonetheless legitimized institutions of the nation-state, despite his earlier scepticism towards the coercive apparatus of government. Along with attempts at 'changing people's hearts', it was equally his mission to preach obedience towards the institutional power-structures of the nation-state.

In any case, a sanitized narrative of Gandhi's 'miracle' remains hegemonic today, and counter-narratives are hard to come by. Fifty years after India's independence, Andrew Whitehead, a journalist at the British Broadcasting Corporation, conducted a series of interviews across India, Pakistan and Bangladesh about experiences of partition in South Asia.[39] As luck would have it, one of them was of Gopal Mukherjee, the notorious Gopal 'Patha' who led the most extensive underground network of *goondas* in 1940s Calcutta. In his account of the episode of the surrender of arms in September 1947, the 83-year-old Gopal Mukherjee provided a narrative radically different from the hegemonic accounts of Gandhi's hagiographers.[40]

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[38] Sumit Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership, 1945-47', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 17, no. 14/16, Annual Number, April 1982, p. 683.
[39] Audio tapes of Andrew Whitehead's interviews have been deposited at the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
[40] Audio recording of his interview with Gopal Mukherjee is available online: http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/partition-voices.html [accessed 15 March 2017].

Gopal Patha confessed that he had enjoyed a close relationship with the bosses of the Bengal Congress, especially Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, who became the Chief Minister of West Bengal soon after independence. But he was no Gandhian. A life-size sculpture of Subhas Bose in full military uniform still adorned his 'office' near Wellington Street when Whitehead met him.[41] An admirer of Bose all his life, he had little regard for the Mahatma. Yet as a pre-eminent leader of Calcutta's underworld, Gopal claimed that Gandhi had approached him twice and he had refused to see him on both occasions. He finally went the third time, when he saw people coming to Gandhi and surrendering weapons that were of no use to anyone: 'out-of-order pistols, that sort of thing'.[42] When Gandhi's secretary (presumably Pyarelal) asked him to surrender his arms, Gopal claimed to have replied: 'with these arms I saved the women of my area, I saved the people. I will not surrender them.'[43] He also claimed to have challenged the Mahatma further: 'Where was Gandhi, I said, during the Great Calcutta Killing? Where was he then? Even if I have used a nail to kill someone, I won't surrender even that nail.'[44]

There is no reason why Gopal Mukherjee's version should be taken as any more accurate than those of Gandhi's hagiographers. The boldness that the 83-year-old Mukherjee attaches to his dealings with Gandhi in his memory of an event half a century ago is more likely to be coloured by the happy imaginings of his youthful bravado in old age. But this research has recovered a corpus of contemporary police sources that provide a third angle to this polarized vision of the events of September

[41] Andrew Whitehead, 'Duty Does Not Permit Repentance: The Butchers of Calcutta', *The Indian Express*, 1 July 1997.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.

1947. The evidence suggests that Gopal met Gandhi not once but twice. Furthermore, the interactions between Gopal and Gandhi were rather conciliatory. On the first occasion, he went to Gandhi in the morning of 4 September 1947 with other *goonda* leaders. They assured Gandhi that there would not be any further 'recrudescence' of riots in Calcutta and 'entreated' him to end his fast.[45] Gandhi, however, refused to be satisfied with 'mere verbal assurance' and demanded that their promises be 'translated into action'.[46] He wanted them to surrender all arms and ammunition in their possession. Later that same evening, Gopal met Gandhi alone. Gandhi handed him an address where, according to his information, six Sten guns were kept hidden and asked Gopal to bring them to him.

Gopal, according to the police report, promised to do so, but only when Gandhi assured him that he would also put pressure on Muslim *goondas* to surrender their arms to him.[47] It is unknown whether Gopal surrendered any arms at all. Police records indicate that despite making promises to start with, he later changed his mind and decided not to surrender any lethal weapons. There are no records of the total number of arms that were surrendered. But going by fragmentary evidence and the exhibits at the Kolkata Police Museum, it does not seem to be a spectacular number and certainly constituted only a small fraction of those that must have been in circulation. But these were not merely useless pistols, as claimed by Gopal in his 1997 interview. At least one Sten gun was surrendered, police records confirm, together with several cartridg-

[45] 'Communal Affairs', 6 September 1947, K.P.M. No. 01488/05, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[46] Ibid.
[47] 'Communal Affairs', 8 September 1947, ibid.

es, hand grenades, country-made pipe guns, choppers and other arms.[48] In any case, the number and potency of the surrendered arms is not at issue here. This was *supposed* to be a symbolic and performative gesture, a spectacle of submission of the *goonda* at the feet of the Mahatma – the moral victory of right over wrong, and of the establishment of the 'order' of the new free India.

The comprehensive disarming of criminal gangs in the city was almost impossible, of course, given the intricate networks of patronage and protection within which the 'institutional riot system' of Calcutta was embedded.[49] The sphere of operation of the gang leaders was often localized and neighbourhood-based, but many were connected with men in high places through a range of affiliations that were numerous, entangled and fluid.

Gang members, as is well-known, often coalesced around local clubs and gymnasiums.[50] Some of these attained particular notoriety. The appropriately named *Narak Gulzar Club* at Suri Lane,[51] for example, became the nodal point for the operation of the Muchipara group of *goondas*, which extended its influence by coordinating its activities with other gangs at Rainbow Club boarding house.[52] These groups then secured their protection by tapping into the connections their leaders maintained. The Muchipara Group was led by the infamous gangster Jagabandhu Bose and his brother Bimal Bose (nick-named 'Bhanu'),[53] both of whom were members of the Congress

[48] Ibid.
[49] I use 'institutional riot system' in the sense formulated by Paul R. Brass, *Theft of an Idol*.
[50] Das and Ray, *The Goondas.*
[51] *Narak Gulzar* may be literally translated as 'hell, the garden of roses'.
[52] 'Communal Situation', 30 August 1947, K.P.M. No. 01488/05, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[53] Ibid.

Socialist Party. Binay Chakravartti, another member of the same gang, belonged to the Hindustan National Guard, a volunteer body with strong connections with the Hindu Mahasabha. Hara, Ramen and Mokhim, junior members of the same group, belonged to the 'Violence Group', an organization led by Bepin Ganguli, a Congress worker of some local repute.[54] Interestingly, it was Ganguli who had arranged for the meeting of the *goonda* delegation with Gandhi on 4 September 1947.[55] This fact puts an entirely different complexion on the Mahatma's miracle.

On closer examination, it emerges that the Muchipara Group also had patrons beyond political circles. One of its principal funders was Makhan Lal Sen, the proprietor of the *Bharat* newspaper.[56] Thus, a single group of young men, operating largely within the jurisdiction of the Muchipara Police Station through local clubs, gymnasiums and boarding houses, proves to have connections both with the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, as well as the press. Many gangs frequently enjoyed protection from the police as well, especially from its lower rungs.[57]

Not only did this *goonda*-politician-media-police nexus make the gangs formidable, many were of some vintage. They almost always had a history of involvement in old terrorist organizations, such as Anushilan and Jugantar, or their later incarnations, for instance the Revolutionary Socialist Party.[58] Often, they also had a history of participation in 'nationalist' struggles. Jagabandhu and Bimal of the Muchipara Group, as members of the Congress Socialist Party, had been active in the Quit India Move-

[54] Ibid.
[55] 'Communal Affairs', 6 September 1947, ibid.
[56] 'Communal Situation', 30 August 1947, ibid.
[57] 'Extract from a Report of an S.B. Officer', 12 September 1947, ibid.
[58] See Chapter 1 for details about the Revolutionary Socialist Party.

ment of 1942. They had also played significant roles in the agitations around the Indian National Army trials in November 1945 and February 1946.[59] The so-called 'nationalist pedigree' of many of these characters co-existed peacefully with their credentials as leaders of murderous Hindu communal gangs. The varied contacts, generous funding and 'nationalist' credentials all made it challenging for the early post-colonial state to uproot these criminal gangs completely, had it ever had the firm intention of so doing.

But the drive to disarm communal groups in the city, however lukewarm, together with the impetus provided by the Mahatma's efforts, created considerable turmoil in Calcutta's underworld. Many of the patrons, protectors, and financiers of *goonda* gangs now attempted a *volte-face* to win favours with the new regime. As stated earlier, Bepin Ganguli, the local Congress leader, who had earlier been the patron of the 'Violence Group', was instrumental in arranging the meeting of *goondas* with Gandhi on 4 September 1947.[60] Other leaders, many of whom were Congress workers, played a similar role. Jagannath Koley, Indu Beed and Deben De, all political leaders with some local clout, had financed a range of neighbourhood-based gangs since communal tensions in the city had reached a high pitch in 1946. Some gang commanders complained that all of these political leaders who had financed and 'instigated' them to carry out the killings were now pleading innocence and 'trying to lay all blames on the group leaders'.[61] Some leading *goondas* also tried to change their posture to suit

[59] 'Communal Situation', 30 August 1947, K.P.M. No. 01488/05, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP. Also see the file entitled 'Action taken by Muchipara P.S. in connection with February Disturbances', K.P.M. No. 01699/05, S.B. File No. 868 (D/7), P.M. (1946), SBR, CP.
[60] 'Communal Affairs', 6 September 1947, K.P.M. No. 01488/05, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[61] 'Miscellaneous: Communal Affairs', 19 September 1947, ibid.

the direction of the prevailing wind. A few joined their patrons and financiers in trying to court favour with government, which now tried to control *goonda* gangs to reassert its legitimacy. Ashu Chatterji, a pleader by profession and leader of the Charakdanga group of *goondas*, was allegedly taking 'much interest' in the rehabilitation of Muslim families in Mia Bagan Bustee, to which the other gangs took a strong exception.[62]

In fact, a sharp divide emerged between those groups which were willing to change their stance and those who held on to a hard anti-Muslim disposition. Jagabandhu Bose of the Muchipara Group inaugurated the surrender of arms to Gandhi. This was strongly denounced by Gopal Mukherjee of Malanga Lane; Gopal even threatened Jagabandhu with death. More significant was the fracture this caused within the Muchipara group that Jagabandhu had previously dominated. His own brother, Bhanu Bose now led a rival faction against him and joined Gopal.[63] The fact that constant gang wars of this kind could spill over and lead to chaos kept the city administration on high alert. But the connections that these gang leaders had with men in positions of power, and the sympathy they commanded among the lower echelons of the police, ensured their protection.

Admittedly, the police carefully monitored the dynamics of the *goonda* world, conducting raids, seizing arms and ammunition and making arrests from time to time.[64] However, state action was mostly directed at those recalcitrant gangs who were indifferent to Gandhi's call to change their ways. Indrajit Das, the leader of

[62] Ibid.
[63] 'Communal Affairs', 9 September 1947, ibid.
[64] 'Miscellaneous: Communal Affairs', 19 September 1947, ibid.

Kalitara Bose Lane group, was one such leader of Calcutta's underworld. He openly fell out with Naresh Chandra Ghose, a Special Constable in Calcutta Police. Naresh, who had masterminded the attacks on the Muslims of Mia Bagan Bustee while Gandhi was living in its vicinity, was 'now assuming an air of innocence and trying to placate the Muslims', much to Indrajit's annoyance.[65] Indrajit threatened him and other financiers, many of whom were local Congress leaders, that if they dared to betray the *goonda* leaders and got them arrested, 'he would divulge all secrets to the police.[66] The nature of these 'secrets' are not difficult to imagine. Leaders in high places had used *goondas* to their advantage, including using them to commit murder and arson. The *goondas* knew enough to put their patrons in deep trouble if they decided to open their mouths, and men like Indrajit now threatened to speak out to damage his former bosses. This time, however, Indrajit had gone too far; somewhat to his surprise, the police arrested him on 25 September 1947. He was released on bail two days later but remained under constant police scrutiny.[67] But some of his close aides remained in detention. In utter bafflement, Indrajit complained that the police, under 'Congress direction', was pursuing a 'suicidal policy'.[68] His gang, he complained, was demoralized by the constant threat of arrests and house-searches. He insisted that there was 'every likelihood of a recrudescence of communal disturbances', when the services of groups such as his would be urgently required.[69] He believed that *goonda* groups were essential for the protection of Hindu citizens of the new nation-state against Muslim onslaughts and thought of his activities as 'service to the community'.[70]

[65] Ibid. Also, 'Extract from a report of an S.B. Officer', 12 September 1947, ibid.
[66] 'Miscellaneous: Communal Affairs', 19 September 1947, ibid.
[67] S.B. notes entitled 'Notings on para 163 of 27 September 1947', ibid.
[68] 'Miscellaneous: Communal Affairs', 27 September 1947, ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.

Needless to say, there were better connected *goonda* leaders than Indrajit. They were never arrested. The police were unable to tackle them with anything like an iron fist. A case in point is Gopal Mukherjee, who counted the Premier himself as a personal friend.[71] Soon after making conciliatory gestures towards Gandhi, all accounts suggest that he had remained steadfast about not surrendering his weapons or giving up his anti-Muslim activities. As a result, Gopal, and others of his ilk, caused the police considerable grief. Every time the authorities apprehended a recurrence of communal violence, Gopal's activities worried them. That their concerns were justified was proved by Gopal's prominent part during the communal riot of 1950.[72]

It must be remembered, however, that the wavering attitude of the administration and the political establishment towards organized networks who instigate riots is not an aberration. As Paul Brass suggests in his description of 'institutional riot systems', riot-prone cities in India have always kept alive networks of professionals who could reliably be called upon to organize riots whenever the occasion demanded. With the connivance of state actors, operators in the riot system act as 'fire-tenders', maintaining the 'fuel at a combustible level, sometimes stoking it, sometimes letting it smoulder'.[73] This is the story of how Calcutta Muslims came to be marginalized and disempowered after independence, despite the regime paying lip-service to secularism and the need for communal harmony.

But the presence and activities of *goondas,* or their patronage at high levels, cannot wholly explain the predicament of Muslim minorities in the city. One must look be-

[71] Whitehead, 'Duty Does Not Permit Repentance'.
[72] For details of Gopal Mukherjee's activities, see Das and Ray, *The Goondas*.
[73] Paul R. Brass, *Theft of an Idol*, pp. 15-16.

yond such networks of criminality to investigate the legitimacy that these riot networks derived from dominant sections of society. The activities of the underworld, if it was to sustain itself after independence, had to resonate at some level with dominant public attitudes and discourses that structured minority formation. This will require a close study of the tropes through which anti-Muslim propaganda circulated in the larger public domain.

Muslims as the Threatening 'Other'

The main trope through which Hindu hostility towards Muslims was articulated was the alleged threat to life and livelihood Hindus faced from Muslims despite partition. Calcutta had a substantial Muslim minority, often concentrated in small pockets. Partition notwithstanding, in its immediate aftermath Muslims sometimes continued to dominate institutions of local government in such areas. Matiaburz, in the suburbs of Calcutta, was one such locality with a substantial concentration of Muslims. The Chairman of the Matiaburz Municipality was a Muslim, so were most of its Councillors. This became a major source of resentment on the part of Hindus who saw Muslim dominance, even at such local levels, as fundamentally illegitimate after partition.

These prejudices were coloured by all-India developments, such as the controversies surrounding the 'accession' of Hyderabad to the Indian Union.[74] An anonymous letter to the Home Minister of West Bengal alleged that the Muslims of Matiaburz

[74] For the accession of Hyderabad to the Indian Union, see A.G. Noorani, *The Destruction of Hyderabad*, London: Hurst, 2014; Taylor C. Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India*.

wanted this area to be treated in the same way as Hyderabad and wanted to merge with Pakistan.[75] Hindus, the letter claimed, were particularly unhappy about the Municipality's connivance at illegalities practiced by Muslim butchers in the area. Butchers' shops, which encroached upon footpaths, were 'really a menace to the Hindus'. Even the police were no match for the 'aggressive and ferocious Muslim butchers'.[76] The letter asserted that the same butchers had massacred Hindus during the Great Calcutta Killing and they feared that happenings in Hyderabad would soon be met by a demand to include Matiaburz in Pakistan.

Sometimes, Hindu resentment against Muslims was expressed through the idiom of Muslim 'appeasement' or 'favouritism', allegedly practiced by unpatriotic Hindus and foreigners. After the announcement of partition, government employees were given six months to decide whether they wanted to serve in India or Pakistan.[77] Unsurprisingly, most Muslim government servants chose to join the Government of Pakistan, while their Hindu counterparts chose India. However, government institutions found it difficult to immediately dispense with the services of many of their employees who chose to migrate to the other dominion and replace them with newcomers. Thus many Muslim employees continued to serve for short periods on temporary contracts in government offices across India. This became a source of grievance for Hindu employees who wanted the government to remove the 'betrayers' with immediate effect. The retention of Muslim employees in government offices, even on short con-

[75] 'From One Who Knows' to the Home Minister, West Bengal, 30 July 1948, K.P.M. No. 3497/08; S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1948).
[76] Ibid.
[77] Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon (eds.), *The Transfer of Power, 1942-47*, vol. XII, no. 287, pp. 416-21; See Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition*, p. 23; S.M. Rai, *Partition of the Punjab: A Study of Its Effects on the Politics and Administration of the Punjab, 1947-1956*, London: Asia Publishing House, 1957.

tracts, was seen as a sign of Muslim 'favouritism'. Hindu employees at the Mint in Calcutta typified the prevailing sentiment. One Lalji, who claimed to represent Hindu workers of the Alipore Mint, complained to the President of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha about how the Mint management was going out of its way to retain the services of Muslim employees who had already decided to leave for Pakistan.[78] A government notification had directed the management to sanction two months' leave to such employees so that they could prepare for their transfer. Accordingly, Muslim workers who had opted for Pakistan had resigned, but had immediately been re-absorbed on daily-wage contracts. The most skilled among them, such as the masons, continued to receive a 'very high salary', often adding up to eight or nine rupees per day. Hindu workers, Lalji claimed, were agitated about how the Mint management were 'appeasing' those who had been 'betraying from the beginning for which India is now divided'.[79] Unpatriotic Hindu officers (who spoke only English and allegedly felt ashamed to talk in Hindi or Bengali), together with the British Officer-in-Charge, Lalji concluded, were behind this move. He urged the President of the Mahasabha to intervene immediately.

Private enterprises operating in, or headquartered in, Calcutta were also looked upon with suspicion, especially where Muslim workers comprised a considerable part of the workforce. Bata Shoe & Co., the Czech company headquartered in India at Batanagar in the vicinity of Calcutta, had a large proportion of Muslim labourers. After partition, the continued dominance of Muslims in its factories irked Hindu workers. They complained that Muslim jobbers, who continued to enjoy patronage from

[78] Lalji, Mint Staff, to President, Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, intercepted on 19 October 1947, K.P.M. No. 1489/05, S.B. File No. 506 II, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[79] Ibid.

the management, were recruiting Muslims from Pakistan but registering them in pay-rolls under false Hindu names.[80] Investigation revealed that the story was false; the new recruit named Atma Ram, who had caused much consternation among Hindu workers, did eventually turn out to be a Hindu.[81] But allegations of this kind gained credence as the company came under official scrutiny for a range of suspicious activities, including the illegal export of machinery to Pakistan.[82] Moreover, Hindu workers had a long-standing grievance about 'Muslim favouritism' in the organization, having complained that their managerial staff had long used Muslim workers as blacklegs to break labour strikes.[83]

Allegations of continued Muslim dominance of workplaces in the city became louder as a sensational story came to light in the factory of Metal Box, a private British enterprise which had its Indian headquarters in Calcutta. As in the factories of Bata, Muslim labourers at Metal Box formed a strong and exclusive coterie.[84] A labour supervisor called Razi Ahmad was a leader of the Muslim National Guard in the Matiaburz area. As a leader of this notorious Muslim League-sponsored volunteer body, he had allegedly masterminded the killing of Hindus during communal riots. Hindu workers complained that the company, especially its allegedly pro-Muslim la-

[80] 'Copy of a Security Control Officer's Report', 14 June 1948, K.P.M. No. 3497/08; S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1948).
[81] Copy of a D.I.O.'s Report, 6 August 1948, ibid; Extract from an Interrogation Report, 22 September 1948, ibid.
[82] Ibid.; Report entitled 'Casual Agent', 23 July 1948, ibid.
[83] Copy of a D.I.O.'s Report, 6 August 1948, ibid.
[84] The case was closely followed by the Special Branch of the Calcutta Police through a series of reports: Untitled report by B. Bhattacharya, 1 June 1948, K.P.M. No. 1489/05, S.B. File No. 506 II, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP; Untitled report by B. Bhattacharya, 4 June 1948, ibid; Confidential Diary entry by S.I. S. Karmakar of S.B. Calcutta, dated 14 June 1948, ibid; Extract from the Commissioner's Daily Register of Cases, 28 May 1948, ibid.

bour welfare officer Mr. Kapani, continued to protect him and retain his services even after partition.

Matters came to a head when Razi Ahmad secured the employment of a new labourer in the factory. The behaviour of this new hand appeared suspicious, allegedly because Razi Ahmad and his gang prevented him from interacting with Hindu workers of the factory. One day, Razi had him mercilessly beaten up for refusing to attend prayers at the neighbouring mosque. But this new recruit soon escaped and lodged a complaint with the Watgunj Police Station. He informed the police that he was a Hindu, that though he was registered at the factory as Mujibul Huq, his real name was Manindra Nath Sarkar.[85] He had been stabbed and kidnapped by a gang of Muslims in the days before partition and once he recovered from his injuries, he had been converted by force to Islam. At first his kidnappers tortured him in captivity; thereafter, they took him to Razi Ahmed and got him work at the Metal Box factory. But he was used as a slave, and his entire salary was confiscated by Razi and his followers.

As this story spread, it infuriated not just the Hindu workers of the factory, but also the Hindus of the locality. Tempers rose even further when it came to light that two of Manindra's tormentors, who were arrested by the police following the complaint, were released on bail. The police reported that Hindus in the factory were so excited that they 'would not hesitate to take the law in their hands to retaliate against the mischief caused by the Muslims'.[86] We do not know what happened thereafter; the ten-

[85] Untitled report by B. Bhattacharya, 4 June 1948, ibid.
[86] Untitled report by B. Bhattacharya, 1 June 1948, ibid.

sion at Metal Box faded away with time. However, it fed a larger Hindu anxiety over forced conversion.

The threat of forced conversion of Hindus to Islam was part of a larger repertoire of discourses though which anti-Muslim sentiments had long been articulated.[87] Yet it gained a special significance after partition. It became a narrative of how, even after partition, Muslims were continuing with their criminal designs to decimate Hindu society. It was to show how thankless Muslims were by nature, to argue why it was useless to 'appease' them. It became a justification for the demand to put those Muslims who chose to remain in Calcutta in their 'proper place'. Absurd stories of forceful conversion in the districts would sometimes make their way to the newspapers, creating a furore in the city. The Bengali daily *Hindusthan* reported, for example, how Muslims in Burdwan had kidnapped a Hindu man and converted him by force to their faith. Thereafter, the Muslims had filed a complaint with the police alleging that the victim's family had murdered him for willingly embracing Islam. The victim, however, managed to escape. He sought the protection of the Burdwan District Hindu Mahasabha. Finally, with Mahasabha's intervention, he obtained justice and saved his family who had been languishing in jail on false charges.[88]

There was also a constant stream of stories of how Muslims had an organized racket for kidnapping young Hindu boys. These kidnapped boys were apparently converted to Islam and raised as Muslims. Many argued that Muslims were adopting this

[87] See Pradip Kumar Dutta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth-century Bengal*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 21-63.
[88] *Hindusthan*, 30 July 1948, newspaper cutting in K.P.M. No. 3497/08, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1948), SBR, CP.

strategy to swell their numbers. With the influx of Hindu refugees from East Bengal, the proportion of Hindus in Calcutta were increasing, thereby reducing the percentage of Muslims in the city's demography even further. Some Hindu propagandists claimed that this was the reason why Calcutta Muslims specifically targeted Hindu refugee children. The latter were also easy targets as they were more vulnerable. Hindu voluntary organizations therefore sprang up to ensure their protection. These organizations put up camps at strategic spots, such as the Sealdah Railway Station, where Hindu refugees poured in from East Bengal.

A police report on an alleged attempt to kidnap a refugee boy in mid-1948 revealed the typical denouement. It claimed that a Muslim man had approached a Hindu refugee family who had arrived at Sealdah Station on their way to a refugee camp at Howrah, and had offered to take charge of their son.[89] On being refused, the man attempted to kidnap the boy while his parents were busy making arrangements. A member of the Servants of Bengal Society, a Hindu voluntary organization, somehow managed to catch the Muslim and raise alarm. A crowd of three hundred Hindus gathered and attempted to assault the man, while shouting 'in a frenzy that Noakhali should be avenged'.[90] The police managed to intervene and arrest him. Such stories obviously increased the paranoia around Muslim 'depredations' and contributed to the making of Calcutta's Muslims a suspect population.

[89] 'Communal Tension', 11 June 1948, K.P.M. No. 1489/05, S.B. File No. 506 II, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[90] Ibid. Noakhali riot in 1946 saw large-scale forceful conversion of Hindus to Islam. For Noakhali riots, see Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal*; Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal*; Roy, 'Making Riots, Making Peace'.

Stories of the forceful conversion of Hindu men to Islam went hand in hand with allegations of the continued abduction and oppression of Hindu women by Muslims – another hoary trope, as Datta has shown.[91] On the eve of Indian independence, pamphlets and posters proliferated in Calcutta that spoke of the need to avenge Muslim depredations on Hindu women and the forceful conversion of Hindu men. A Hindi leaflet published in Calcutta, which found its way to various North Indian provinces, asked Hindus why they wanted to celebrate India's freedom from colonial rule on 15 August 1947.[92] It asserted that the day must be observed as the first anniversary of the Great Calcutta Killing; instead of celebrating it, Hindus should spend the day weeping in shame. It prepared an inventory of reasons why the day must be mourned. The rape of Hindu women and their forceful marriage to Muslim men topped the list, together with lamentations over forceful conversion of Hindu men. It carried a picture of a supposedly Hindu women being forced to walk naked amidst a Muslim crowd carrying Pakistani flags.[93] Such propaganda gripped the city in the days after partition. A widely circulated Bengali leaflet threatened the West Bengal ministry with dire consequences if it failed to prevent oppression of Hindu women in East Bengal. It claimed that Muslim League ministers were 'still casting their lustful eyes upon Hindu women'; Muslim police officers transferred from Calcutta to East Bengal were

[91] Dutta, *Carving Blocs*, pp. 21-63.
[92] Criminal Investigation Department, Special Branch, Lucknow to Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Branch, Calcutta, 28 September 1947 (Hindi leaflet enclosed), K.P.M. No. 01488/05, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP; For English translation of the leaflet, see Confidential Diary entry by Sub-Inspector K.S. Pandit of S.B., Calcutta, dated 16 September 1947, ibid.
[93] Ibid. Though the leaflet was posted from Calcutta, Calcutta Police denied that the leaflet was published in the city.

'still committing adultery on Hindu women'; and it insisted that the only way of teaching Muslims a lesson was 'shooting them like dogs'.[94]

A stream of reports on the 'recovery' of Hindu women found their way into English and Bengali dailies. These invariably prompted angry letters to editors from members of the public complaining of administrative complacency. For example, on 27 June 1948, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* reported that police had recovered four Hindu girls, aged between sixteen and twenty-five years, and two minor Hindu boys, while searching the house of a Muslim *goonda*.[95] This prompted one Rabindra Nath Biswas to write to the Editor of the paper accusing the police of not paying heed to popular demands for a thorough search of all Muslim houses in Calcutta. It was a matter of shame, he insisted, that the kidnapping of Hindu women and children had continued unabated even after partition. Every day, he complained, radio and newspaper stories were replete with reports of missing Hindu women and children. A search of 'suspected Muslim areas', he claimed, would lead to many more recoveries.[96] In another, Arabinda Ghosh wrote to the editor of *Hindusthan* expressing exasperation at daily reports of Hindu women recovered from the clutches of Muslim *goondas*.[97] He claimed that even the respectable-looking Muslims were not above suspicion. He called upon the police to conduct a 'systematic search' of all Muslim houses in Calcutta, for nothing could be more insulting for Hindus than having to endure Muslim oppression of Hindu women within the territory of Hindustan.[98]

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[94] Report titled 'Communal Situation', Central Intelligence Officer, Calcutta, 30 August 1947, ibid. Also see 'Miscellaneous: Communal Affairs', 1 September 1947, ibid.
[95] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 27 June 1948.
[96] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 2 July 1948.
[97] *Hindusthan*, 13 July 1948.
[98] For paranoia around Hindu women's purity and their bodies, see Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*, Bloomington: Indiana

The demand for the rescue of Hindu women from Muslim oppression, of course a long-standing theme in Hindu communal discourse, had a few novel dimensions which are worth highlighting. Some of these were peculiar to the circumstances that prevailed around the time of partition and its aftermath. As the above examples show, the need for protecting Hindu women from the lust of Muslim men was often articulated together with concerns over the religious conversion of Hindu men. Yet there was a conspicuous absence of concern about the conversion of Hindu women. Women were largely seen as unmarked by religion, acquiring the faith of whoever 'owned' their bodies. The Hindu woman's body was a commodity that had to be prevented from being stolen by Muslim men; for she would automatically become part of Muslim society, it was assumed, if any Muslim man managed to marry, impregnate, or have sexual relations with her.[99]

The argument went a step further, and this was peculiar to the post-partition context. Many Hindu commentators seemed to believe that the responsibility of protecting Hindu women did not lie with Hindu men alone; it was very much a special re-

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University Press, 2001. Also see Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2006.

[99] A large body of literature on gender and partition has highlighted how even government policy concerning women articulated the idea that women's bodies belonged to men and to the religion that their menfolk subscribed to. These were evident in attempts at 'recovering' women who were (or were presumed to be) abducted during partition violence. See Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, London: Hurst & Company, 2000; Also, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin (eds.), *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998; for Bengal, see Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta, *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India*, vol. 1, Kolkata: Stree, 2003; Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta, *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India*, vol. 2, Kolkata: Stree, 2009. For the impact of partition on women and their families, and politicization of refugee women in Bengal, see Gargi Chakravartty, *Coming out of Partition: Refugee Women of Bengal*, New Delhi: Bluejay Books, 2005. For a more contemporary analysis of women's bodies in the context of communal violence, See Tanika Sarkar, 'Semiotics of Terror', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 37, no. 28, 13 July 2008.

sponsibility of the post-partition Indian state. In that sense, independent India was an essentially Hindu state. If the Indian state also protected Muslims, it was a mark of its generosity, not its duty. A common refrain in most of this Hindu communal propaganda involved anger over how the Indian nation-state was unable to protect Hindu women despite protecting Muslims who remained in India.[100] In fact, police reports from Calcutta reveal that the government took its responsibility of protecting Hindu women very seriously.

A series of reports from Calcutta demonstrate the enthusiasm with which Calcutta Police took up this 'responsibility'. Such reports are often presented as success stories, proof of the commitment of the city police to its assigned duty. A closer look, however, often reveals much complexity, especially the lack of any sensitivity to the wishes of the women involved in such cases.[101] In December 1948, Calcutta Police raided a Muslim *bustee* on information provided by a Mahasabha activist. They 'recovered' a sixteen-year-old Hindu girl from the house of one Abdur Razzaque.[102] Her brother identified her as Santi, who had gone missing in early 1945. Razzaque maintained that he was married to Santi. The latter, who was the mother of a two-year-old girl, tried to hide her Hindu identity and wanted the police to leave them alone. But she was 'minutely crossed by the police'; when she failed to answer questions 'satisfactorily', the police report claimed, 'the truth came out'.[103] Razzaque was arrested and Santi, along with her daughter, was sent to a rescue home. The complexity of the

[100] Confidential diary entry by S.I. H.M. Bhattacharya of S.B., Calcutta, dated 4 August 1948, K.P.M. No. 3497/08, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1948), SBR, CP.
[101] See Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin (eds.), *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998; Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, London: Hurst & Company, 2000.
[102] Report of S.I. Jahar Lall Sen entitled 'Rescue of a Hindu girl from the house of a Muslim in Chitpur area', 13 December 1948, ibid.
[103] Ibid.

facts mattered little, as did the will of the woman involved. The very fact that Santi was living with a Muslim man made the latter into a criminal and her into a victim of abduction. Another case reveals how lower rungs of the police were given a free hand in intervening whenever they spotted a Hindu woman with a Muslim man. This time, two Constables arrested a Muslim man on the mere suspicion of kidnapping when they saw him in a rickshaw with a woman who 'looked like' a Hindu. Despite all indications that this was a case of elopement, the police report insisted that the man 'enticed the girl away from her father's place'.[104] To give credibility to the Constables' actions, it also added that he had 'criminally assaulted her on the way'.

For 'recoveries' of Hindu women from the alleged clutches of Muslim men, there was no lack of enthusiasm among large sections of Hindu men in assisting the police. In one case, a group of Hindus took the initiative in 'rescuing' a Hindu woman and handing her over to the police when they noticed her come out of a Muslim *bustee*. Police investigations revealed that her first husband, who was a Hindu, had died in a communal clash some time back. She had nowhere to go; she needed to find shelter and feed herself and her son. Some time later, she got to know a Muslim man and eventually moved in with him to a Muslim *bustee*. However, this man also died a few months later. Now, having to fend for herself and her son, she had only come out of the *bustee* to get some water from a roadside tap, when Hindu neighbours spotted her and handed her over to the police. On charges which remain unknown, police arrested five Muslims in this connection.

[104] Report entitled 'Kidnapping of a Hindu girl by a Muslim', 22 October 1948, ibid.

Newspapers with Hindu readerships often played an important role in ratifying police versions of such 'recovery' stories. Putting all complexities aside, the Bengali daily *Basumati* reported the above incident as the uncomplicated story of the 'rescue' of a Hindu woman.[105] There were even occasions when some newspapers published stories that were factually wrong. On 12 August 1948, a report in the *Hindusthan Standard*, for example, claimed that police had rescued a young Hindu girl from the house of a Punjabi Muslim.[106] However, the police report on this case confirmed that the man was, in fact, a Punjabi Hindu and was married to the girl. However, because they lived in a *bustee* with a large proportion of Muslims, Hindus of the locality were convinced that the man was a Punjabi Muslim.[107]

Public demands that Muslims be taught a lesson became more insistent following reports of an outbreak of communal violence in Santipur, a town in Nadia district not far from Calcutta. It started with an incident on 19 June 1948, when a group of Muslim men chased three Hindu schoolgirls; they managed to catch one of them and molest her. This enraged Hindus of the area. When, the following day, Hindus of Santipur discovered the head of a freshly-slaughtered cow stuck on a clump of bamboos in the centre of town, a full-scale riot broke out.[108]

But instead of calling for peace, the Calcutta papers encouraged Hindus to crush Muslims once and for all. An editorial in *Hindusthan* exemplified this mood.[109] It re-

[105] *Basumati*, 9 July 1948, newspaper cutting, ibid.
[106] *Hindusthan Standard*, 12 August 1948.
[107] Confidential diary entry by S.I. Jahar Lall Sen of S.B., Calcutta, 13 August 1948, K.P.M. No. 3497/08, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1948), SBR, CP.
[108] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 29 July 1948; Extract from the West Bengal Police Abstract of Intelligence, 31 July 1948, K.P.M. No. 3497/08, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1948), SBR, CP.
[109] *Hindusthan*, 25 July 1948, newspaper cutting, ibid.

counted how during the days of the Raj, Muslims had freely gone around raping Hindu women in Bengal. The 'Muslim-loving British administration' and 'Muslim-appeasing Congress-minded Hindus' did little to prevent such incidents. It claimed that Muslim *goondas* were openly assisted by their co-religionists, irrespective of class backgrounds. Large Muslim crowds were even known to have honoured Muslim rapists with garlands in public ceremonies to celebrate the dishonouring of Hindu women. For a while after independence, the editorial observed, there was a lull in Muslim criminal activities. Yet, by the first anniversary of Indian independence, Muslims had renounced all pretence at self-control and renewed their habit of raping women of Hindu households. It pointed to the incidents leading to the riots at Santipur as proof of Muslim depredations and proclaimed that the Hindu reaction there was entirely justified. It went to the extent of hinting at the undesirability of government efforts to protect Muslims of Santipur. Finally, the editorial reflected on why the Muslim criminals were feeling empowered again and what should be done to remedy this. It declared the reason to be the timidity of Hindu men and the Congress government's 'weaknesses' for Muslims. The only way of controlling Muslim mischief, it insisted, was to apprehend them before they could even touch the women. This was not a task that the police could perform, as they were only allowed to act when a crime actually took place. It was the fearless Hindu youth, the writer insisted, who should take up the mantle of crushing Muslim criminals before they could do anything. Thus suspicion was sufficient for Hindu young men to apprehend Muslims. The last line of the editorial, however, mentioned that the destiny of Hindus lay in the ability of young men to sacrifice their lives to protect women without practicing violence or attacking the enemy. This, however, sits uncomfortably with the entire tenor of the editorial and was, in all probability, inserted to escape press censorship. Taken as a whole, this editorial

remains a testimony to the degree of leverage given to newspapers with a Hindu audience to incite Hindu violence against Muslims.

Thus a significant section of Hindus, the police and some allied newspapers emerged as self-proclaimed guardians of Hindu society, committed to protecting them from the city's Muslims. The tropes of Muslim favouritism, the conversion of Hindu men to Islam and the continued oppression of Hindu women framed the arguments in favour of the socio-political subjugation of Calcutta's Muslims. The next section will discuss the precise mechanisms by which the Muslims of Calcutta were marginalized and how they responded to the changed circumstances after partition.

The National State and the Making of Calcutta's Muslim Minority

The partition of British India into India and Pakistan dramatically altered the position of urban Muslims who remained within India.[110] The predicament of Calcutta's Muslims was a part of the same story, but the transformation was sharper than in many other parts of the country. For almost a decade before partition, Muslim political formations, especially the Muslim League, had dominated Bengal through the headquarters of the provincial government in Calcutta. This had made the city's Muslims a powerful minority. With partition, Calcutta became the capital of the Hindu-majority province of West Bengal. The position and influence of Calcutta's Muslims declined rapidly thereafter. They became a marginalized group, and the object of re-

[110] See the excellent collection of essays by Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot (eds.), *Muslims in Indian Cities: Trajectories of Marginalization*, London: Hurst & Company, 2012.

sentment that so many Hindus of the city had nurtured for years. The fact that Calcutta's Muslims had to reconcile themselves to a position of marginality became clear from the disposition of the Muslim political leadership almost immediately after the decision to partition Bengal was confirmed.

Partition unnerved even the 'Nationalist Muslims' of Calcutta. They petitioned the Bengal Congress not to forget them 'in the heat and hurry of the time and circumstances'.[111] They wanted assurances from the Congress leaders that whatever the fate of Bengal might turn out to be, they would not be 'thrown to the wolf'.[112] To convince the Congress of their loyalty, the petitioners went on a diatribe against Muslims who demanded Pakistan, alleging that the Direct Action Committees of the League were responsible for keeping 'the fire burning'.[113] They were beyond control of even the Provincial Leagues. They insisted, therefore, that the Congress take up the initiative in ensuring that these Committees were banned.

For their part, Muslim League leaders were inclined towards compromise. As mentioned above, ever since Gandhi's campaign for peace on 15 August, Suhrawardy had urged Muslims to forget everything that the leaders of the Muslim League, including himself, had previously told them. He advised them to uphold all the symbols of the Indian nation-state, from flags to slogans, before even these were demanded from them. By November 1947, again it was Suhrawardy who raised doubts about whether the Muslim League should exist at all in the changed situation. An all-India confer-

[111] Anonymous letter to the Secretary, Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, 1 May 1947, K.P.M. No. 01488/05, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.

ence of Muslim leaders called at Suhrawardy's behest in Calcutta led to many acrimonious debates.[114] The tense atmosphere prevailing even after the cessation of violence in September 1947 is apparent from the precaution Suhrawardy took to ensure the safety of the delegates. Having no faith in the West Bengal government or its police, he had gathered a private militia of five hundred strong from members of the Muslim National Guard.[115]

In his address to the delegates, Suhrawardy painted a bleak picture of the future of Muslims in India. He feared that a commercial boycott could begin any moment in Calcutta against Muslim enterprises, which would mean financial ruin for Muslims of the city. He also felt that whatever may be the attitude of the Congress towards Muslims, allegations of 'Muslim appeasement' would force the Congress to leave the Muslims in the cold sooner or later. The meeting reached no conclusion, but the *Star of India* reported on 14 November 1947 that the delegates had expressed their virtually unanimous opinion that the League had, for all practical purposes, already 'ceased to exist'.[116] They had allegedly taken the view that League leaders should now join hands with the 'nationalist Muslim leadership'.[117] Finally, on 18 March 1948, Abul Hashem, a key figure in the Bengal League, informed the West Bengal Legislative Assembly that the Parliamentary Parties of the Muslim League in West Bengal, Oris-

[114] K.P.M. No. 02517/05, S.B. File No. 606A, P.I. (1947), SBR, CP.
[115] Ibid.
[116] *Star of India*, 14 November 1947, newspaper clipping, F. No. 1045/47, Intelligence Bureau, Government of Bengal (henceforth, IB, GB), West Bengal State Archives (henceforth, WBSA). Quoted in Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition*, p. 173.
[117] Ibid.

sa and Assam had been dissolved; for, in the 'changed circumstances', 'communal organizations should be liquidated in the best interests of the Indian Dominion'.[118]

The dissolution of the League, which had been the assertive face of Muslim politics in India since at least the 1930s, created a sense of abandonment among the ordinary Muslims of Calcutta. But what heightened their sense of betrayal even more were the appeals by the League leaders that they give up the religious rights that they had won through so many years of struggle. Muhammad Usman, Secretary of the Calcutta District Muslim League, at a meeting in October 1947 insisted that the Muslims of Calcutta should refrain from sacrificing cows in mosques situated in Hindu localities (even in cases where such a custom existed), and from carrying beef through Hindu areas. Muslims were even to tolerate processions playing loud music to pass through mosques during prayer-time.[119] This was just the prelude to the tragic loss of religious freedoms and spaces that Joya Chatterji describes in vivid detail.[120]

The Muslims of Calcutta who had supported the League movement for Pakistan reacted in multiple and complex ways to the quick surrender of the Muslim League leadership to the new dispensation. Many better-off Muslims, together with the bulk of the political elite, decided to leave for East Bengal. Several Muslim businessmen and merchants shifted their families and their movable wealth to safer destinations, but they themselves waited in Calcutta to see whether matters would settle down be-

[118] West Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings (henceforth WBLAP), vol. II, no. 2, 18 March 1948, p. 246; See Acting Deputy Commissioner for UK, Calcutta to High Commissioner for UK, New Delhi, 23 March 1948, L/PJ/5/316, IOR. Also see in Bandyopadhayay, *Decolonization in South Asia*, pp. 48-49.
[119] 'Muslim Affairs', 28 October 1947, K.P.M. No. 1489/05, S.B. File No. 506 II, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[120] Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition*; Chatterji, 'Of Graveyards and Ghettos'.

fore making their final call. But there were the vast numbers of lower-middle class and poor Muslims for whom leaving their hearth and home was no easy matter. This was a decision they could not take in haste. For them it was their last option.

Those poorer Muslims of Calcutta who were reluctant to leave the city responded to the quick escape of the rich and powerful among their co-religionists to East Bengal with bitter resentment. A Bengali leaflet circulating in the name of the city's Muslim *bustee*-dwellers asserted that it was the Muslim poor who had sacrificed their lives for Pakistan since Direct Action Day. Now that Pakistan had been achieved, their leaders were abandoning them to enjoy the fruits of *their* struggles. They accused the leaders of not making any effort to get Calcutta included in Pakistan. The leaflet demanded that if the Muslim elite decided to emigrate, they must leave behind their belongings with the people in the *bustees*; or else their erstwhile followers would not hesitate to 'answer cruelty with cruelty'.[121] The Central Intelligence Officer of Calcutta reported that 'Muslim hooligan elements' had discarded all loyalty to their former leaders.[122] The report claimed that even Muslim politicians admitted that there was a widespread sense among ordinary Muslims of being cheated by their political leaders; the leaders had, therefore, lost control over 'illiterate Muslims'.[123] Believing that Pakistan had become a reality because of their effort, they felt they had enough strength left in them to retain Calcutta for themselves. This sense of betrayal continued as ordinary Muslims found themselves increasingly marginalized in their own

[121] 'Communal Situation in Calcutta', 4 August 1947, K.P.M. No. 01488/05, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[122] Extract from a report by the Central Intelligence Officer, 9 August 1947, ibid.
[123] Ibid.

city. Neither did this sentiment remain confined merely to 'illiterate Muslims' or 'hooligan elements'.

There are some indications of the emergence of a new, albeit low-profile, Muslim social leadership from among the ranks of small businessmen and petty traders who remained in Calcutta. As localized riots broke out in pockets of north Calcutta in the middle of 1948, a group of Muslim entrepreneurs came forward to negotiate with the officials to restore peace. A secret intelligence report from May 1948 mentions that a group of Muslim neighbourhood leaders, all petty traders and businessmen, had come together to discuss how 'ordinary' Muslims of Calcutta could protect themselves.[124] They insisted that unlike the rich and influential Muslims of Park Circus and Amratolla, the survival of Muslim traders, small entrepreneurs and poor labourers depended upon their everyday dealings with Hindus. They could, therefore, ill afford to follow the prosperous Muslims of posh Muslim neighbourhoods, many of whom had already shifted most of their property and family to Pakistan. This enraged one of the leaders, the report observed, who asserted that if he had a few loyal young men, he would ensure that the rich Muslims were robbed of their wealth before they could leave Calcutta. Others at the meeting pacified him, and decided that apart from the peace committee they had decided to form together with Hindus, they would also raise a small batch of 'young intelligent volunteers' to collect intelligence from Hindu areas and warn Muslims of impending trouble. How successful these plans were, or the extent of the influence of this new Muslim leadership, is difficult to ascertain. But the point remains that the older Muslim leadership of Calcutta, who had previously

[124] 'Communal Trouble', 30 May 1948, K.P.M. No. 3497/08, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1948), SBR, CP.

organized themselves mainly under the banner of the Muslim League, increasingly found themselves discredited. This provided the space for the emergence of a new stratum of localized neighbourhood-based community leadership who came to represent the Muslims of the city under these vastly altered circumstances.[125]

Calcutta also had an intricate network of Muslim criminal gangs that the Muslim League had exploited and patronized in the days before Partition. Used to their position of dominance, this Muslim underclass took time to adjust to the changed conditions. Within the city, there still were pockets where Muslims had a strong presence; many of these gangs felt that they could retain their power in such neighbourhoods and carry on as earlier with the same degree of impunity. Soon it became evident, however, that their influence had come under challenge from Hindus and the state machinery that the latter now came to dominate.

Khidderpore, the site of the Calcutta port, had a high concentration of working-class Muslims, dominated by lascars and dock labourers. It was also notorious for its *goonda* gangs, patronized by the Muslim League before partition. The prospect of Calcutta being made a part of Hindu-majority West Bengal caused considerable consternation among these gangs, who had strong roots among the Muslim labouring poor of the area. By the beginning of August 1947, leaflets circulated among these labourers urged them to 'plunge into action' to retain Calcutta in Pakistan by force.[126] Even after the inclusion of Calcutta in West Bengal, at least some Muslims of

[125] Joya Chatterji argues for the emergence of a new Muslim leadership in the 1950s. The neighbourhood-based community leadership described above predates the phenomenon Chatterji describes. See Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition*; Chatterji, 'Of Graveyards and Ghettos'.
[126] 'Copy of a report by the Central Intelligence Officer', 1 August 1947, K.P.M. No. 01488/05, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.

Khidderpore still saw the arrangement as only a temporary one. On the first anniversary of India's independence, secret intelligence alerted the police to organized propaganda in Khidderpore that Calcutta would soon become a part of Pakistan. According to these propagandists, India and Pakistan would soon go to war on the issue of Kashmir. With the Indian army busy defending the country's western borders, Pakistani troops would invade from the eastern front and capture the whole of West Bengal.[127] While the police failed to establish the veracity of this information, they nonetheless expressed concern over the fact that almost ninety-five percent of Muslim households in Khidderpore had not hoisted the Indian national flag on Independence Day.[128]

Confidence among Khidderpore's Muslims about their ability to maintain continued dominance in the area did not last very long. With the eclipse of the Muslim League in West Bengal, the shield that had protected them had collapsed, especially for those who had their hands stained by the stamp of criminality. This not only exposed them to the long arm of the law, but also to attacks from rival Hindu *goonda* gangs who now enjoyed protection under the new regime. Take for example, the story of Nasiruddin, who ran a ration and coal shop at Khidderpore; he was a powerful local figure with some connections in the world of crime. Hindus of the area had a long-standing grudge against Nasiruddin for his 'hatred' of Hindus, manifested in his 'rough' behaviour towards Hindu customers.[129] One day, in June 1948, the cashier of his shop made 'some objectionable remarks against a Hindu girl' in the presence of

[127] Confidential Diary entry from S. Karmakar of S.B. Calcutta, dated 15 August 1948, K.P.M. No. 3497/08, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1948), SBR, CP.
[128] Ibid.
[129] 'Information of CIO about communal tension in Khidderpore', 21 July 1948, K.P.M. No. 3497/08, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1948), SBR, CP.

his Hindu customers.[130] Very soon, bands of Hindu *goondas* attacked his shop and assaulted Nasiruddin and his employees. Nasiruddin filed a police complaint, but to no avail. It was he, and not those who had attacked his shop, whom the Deputy Commissioner summoned to his office and warned of consequences if he did not amend his conduct.

It also transpired that since partition, Nasiruddin had become the target of some Hindu gangs who wanted to establish their authority in Khidderpore. They had even got him arrested on a previous occasion by exposing his dealings in the black market. A report from the Central Intelligence Officer observed that 'Hindu hooligan elements' were, in fact, 'itching for creating communal unrest' in Khidderpore and were on the lookout for opportunities to victimize Muslims in the area.[131] What was more, these Hindu gangs continued to receive support and patronage from the local Congress Committee, members of which had become 'a danger to local Mohammedans'.[132] Nasiruddin, like other Muslims with criminal records against them, had become an easy target despite their prowess as *goondas*. They learnt the hard way that their dominance, even in localities such as Khidderpore, was slipping away.

This sense of disempowerment was not confined to those with criminal records. For the smallest 'anti-Hindu' assertions, Muslims of Khidderpore, even those with no criminal past, also came under the police scanner. A police report of a 'communal commotion' in the area is indicative of this trend. This was caused when a Muslim

[130] Ibid.
[131] 'General Situation', forwarded by the CIO, Calcutta, 24 June 1948, ibid.
[132] R. Ghosh to Vallabhbhai Patel, AICC-II, PB-21/1956. Quoted in Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition*, p. 177.

tenant of a house in Khidderpore expressed his annoyance at the early morning *Mahalaya* Radio programme and abused 'the Hindu religion' in the 'most vituperative language'.[133] Local police intervened and the Deputy Commissioner warned him for his behaviour. These kinds of police interference in the smallest of everyday local disputes, which barely concealed the state's majoritarian bias, must have reinforced the sense of marginalization of the city's Muslims.

Muslim subordination in post-partition Calcutta has to be understood in the context of the reorganization of the state machinery in the aftermath of partition. As mentioned above, government employees could opt to serve either India or Pakistan following the division of the subcontinent. Most Muslims chose Pakistan, just as Hindus chose India almost to a man. Senior officials often saw this as a career move and refused to call themselves refugees when they emigrated as government servants.[134] But there is evidence to suggest that for many low-ranking state functionaries, intimidation and fear of future discrimination often dictated their choices.[135] Indeed, intelligence reports point to an organized conspiracy to murder Muslim policemen in cold blood after the partition of Bengal was announced on 3 June 1947. None of the culprits were ever brought to book.[136] With Muslim personnel reduced to a small minority within the force, the Calcutta Police emerged out of partition with a distinctly Hindu colour.

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[133] 'Miscellaneous: Communal Agitation', 24 September 1949, K.P.M. No. 3498/08, S.B. File No. 506/49, P.M. (1949), SBR, CP. This is the early morning radio programme aired every year, even to this day, marking the beginning of the Durga Puja celebrations in Calcutta. The programme consists of songs devoted to the Goddess, interspersed with scriptural recitations.
[134] Md. Mahbubar Rahman and Willem van Schendel, '"I Am *Not* a Refugee": Rethinking Partition Migration', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2003, pp. 551-84.
[135] Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition*, p. 168.
[136] Ibid. See details in File No. 614, Year 1947, IB, GB, WBSA; File No. 1123, Year 1947, IB, GB, WBSA.

This was also reflected in its attitude towards problems of 'social order'. The law of the land technically applied equally to all citizens; yet discrimination in the treatment of Hindu and Muslim outlaws, evident in contemporary police records, exposed the biases in the administration. Moral persuasion was the preferred strategy to 'convince' Hindu criminal gangs to disarm themselves. In case of Muslim *goondas*, however, the law-and-order machinery did not feel the need to administer any such palliatives. These men had to confront the might of the state head-on.

While Gandhi was busy inviting Hindu *goondas* to surrender arms out of their own volition, the task of disarming Muslim *goondas* fell to the Anti-Robbery squad, assisted by intelligence agencies. Paranoia around Muslim 'conspiratorial organizations'[137] made the police fall back upon a tried and tested strategy: turning members of criminal gangs into state approvers, through a mixture of threats, intimidation and promises of protection.[138] Anonymously filed testimony, for example, gives details of how Muslim *goonda* gangs managed to procure firearms and ammunition for use during communal riots. In his own words, the approver claimed to be a '*goonda*' of considerable infamy.[139] Not without a touch of pride, he declared that 'thieves' and 'robbers' were terrified of him. They paid him regular subscriptions and generous cuts from their booty. A 'staunch follower of Mr. Shahid Suhrawardy', his job was to 'create disturbances in meetings organized to criticise his actions'.[140] His activities were

[137] Commissioner of Police to Deputy Commissioner, Special Branch, Calcutta, 31 July 1948, K.P.M. No. 3497/08, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1948), SBR, CP.
[138] For a fascinating discussion of what it meant for those accused of a crime to become an approver, see Shahid Amin, 'Approver's Testimony, Judicial Discourse: The Case of Chauri Chaura' in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies V*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 166-202.
[139] 'Extract from a statement of a secret agent of the Anti Robbery Section, Calcutta', 6 April 1948, K.P.M. No. 1489/05, S.B. File No. 506 II, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.
[140] Ibid.

well-known and all the top bosses of the Bengal League, including Suhrawardy, Nazimuddin, and even the League financier Mr. Ispahani, he claimed, 'utilized' him 'for collecting funds by threats and creating troubles in places where they wanted'.[141] He also claimed to act as a middleman in the supply chain of arms to the Muslim Relief Committee, a League volunteer organization that had sprung up in the days after the Great Calcutta Killing ostensibly to provide relief to Muslim riot victims. Providing details of how the Committee sourced its arms from 'a Negro of an American ship', he confessed that he had received fifty rupees as brokerage per firearm for these transactions.[142] But after partition, he assured the police, he was leading the 'quiet life' of an ordinary shopkeeper.

The strategy of forcing former accomplices to testify against their comrades seems to have been used widely to infiltrate criminal networks run by Muslim gangs. Although its success is difficult to measure, its impact is revealed by the ripples it caused in the world of crime. At times it led to localized tensions. The Calcutta Police noticed, for example, a 'great commotion' in the Amherst Street area one July evening in 1948. Enquiries revealed that Hindus of the locality were protesting against a local Muslim 'bully' who had allegedly assaulted and stabbed a Hindu.[143] On further investigation, the police learnt that the man who had been stabbed was, in fact, a Muslim, and that he was stabbed by a member of his own gang. Abdul Rouf, the perpetrator of the crime, had plotted to murder the victim as this former accomplice of his had turned into a state approver and had deposed against him.

[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] 'Report on Incident on 19.7.48', undated, K.P.M. No. 3497/08, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1948), SBR, CP.

Becoming a state approver was one of the strategies that the Muslim poor, blackened by criminal records, adopted to survive the state onslaught. But the loss of protection was only one dimension of their subordination; the other was the loss of patronage that endangered their livelihood. Exploitation by the Muslim political elite for their own gain, in return for protection and patronage, had also served to ensure a livelihood for members of the Muslim poor forced into criminality. It had enabled them to extract protection money from the neighbourhoods they dominated. Muslim *goondas*, just like their Hindu counterparts, were able to collect subscriptions from their co-religionists as payment for the service of 'protecting' them from their communal 'Others'; some had even demanded money from Hindus as a charge for sparing their lives during a Muslim offensive. Now, however, their vulnerability to the reorganized police made it impossible to earn livelihoods by extracting protection money. Those who had earlier paid regular subscriptions saw no reason to do so any more; it was evident that their erstwhile protectors were now themselves in need of protection. If the former subscribers continued to pay, they could, in fact, face police harassment. This was the perfect time for many erstwhile protection-seekers to make noise about the 'depredations' of their former protectors. Thus, 'respectable' Muslims (and also some Hindus) who had previously paid protection money to Muslim criminal gangs, now began organizing themselves to invite the state to 'rescue' them from Muslim *goondas*. Thus, on the eve of partition, when 'Muslim *goonda* elements' went about 'extorting money' from 'peaceful Muslim residents of Free School Street' (the categories invoked in the police record are instructive), the latter openly held a '*Mohalla* meeting' to discuss ways of stopping 'such rowdyism and criminal pursuits'.[144] This

[144] Report of the Central Intelligence Officer, Calcutta, 28 July 1947, K.P.M. No. 01488/05, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.

is one way in which the onslaught of the new state, overwhelmingly Hindu in composition and pro-Hindu in orientation, broke down Muslim communal solidarities that had, in the days before Partition, cut through the various registers of social differentiation within the community. This changed, in very significant ways, the vocabulary in which Calcutta's Muslims represented themselves and related to the emerging nation-state.

This rhetoric of being 'peaceful residents' was deployed ever more frequently by 'ordinary' Muslims of Calcutta to claim protection from, and demonstrate loyalty to, the new state-in-the-making. It became a dominant trope in their self-description. This was radically different from the assertive voice of this middling section of Calcutta's Muslims during the League regime, when large sections of them had fearlessly foregrounded their Muslim identity in describing themselves or making demands on the government. During the last days of the Raj, when the political dominance of the Muslim League in Calcutta was slipping away, those Muslims who neither belonged to the politico-economic elite nor were stained by criminality increasingly described themselves in non-communal terms. An appeal to the Bengal Government by residents of a Muslim *bustee* on Keshab Chandra Sen Street is illustrative of the changed modes of self-representation.[145]

At least since the Great Calcutta Killing, communal fractures in Calcutta were deep enough to divide the urban space into Hindu and Muslim zones. Hindus found it dangerous to pass through Muslim-dominated areas and the same was true the other

[145] Member of 113 Keshab Sen Street to Finance Minister, Government of Bengal, 31 July 1947, ibid.

way round. The letter to the Bengal Government spoke of how Keshab Chandra Sen Street was the only corridor connecting eastern and central Calcutta that Muslims could access. After the 3 June announcement, the petitioners complained, even this stretch had become prone to Hindu attacks. What is striking about this letter is the very language through which this resentment was articulated. The Muslim complainants diligently described themselves as 'defenceless citizens' and the attackers as 'miscreants'.[146] Referring to administrative bias, the 'harmless citizens' complained how, after communal incidents, police always searched and arrested people 'not from the community that attacks, but from the victims of the attack'.[147] The context makes it clear that the petitioners were complaining about anti-Muslim discrimination in police investigation. But they scrupulously avoided describing the victims as Muslims and oppressors as Hindus. It reveals a new 'common sense' among Muslims in post-partition Calcutta that if they wanted to make claims on the newly emerging nation-state, the language of citizenship was far more effective than that of religious identity. This is in stark contrast to the way in which Hindus were freely asserting their Hindu identity to claim special protection and privileges from the state, almost assuming that the new state after partition was a *de facto* Hindu state. It was the Muslim minority of Calcutta who made constant appeals to the formal claims of the Indian state to be the champion of secular nationalism and civic citizenship.

Newspapers which had pro-Muslim League orientations in the days before partition deployed similar strategies in their reportage. Under the changed circumstances, reports in such papers exhibited a cautious approach and a reluctance to posit 'Hindu

[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.

vs Muslim' binaries while discussing communal antagonisms. Most of these adopted the tone of seeking protection from the state as *good citizens*, while scrupulously avoiding any direct accusation against Hindus or the government. An editorial in *Azad*, which complained about circulation of anti-Muslim rumours in different neighbourhoods of Calcutta, is a case in point. Avoiding any direct confrontation, or identifying the alleged rumour-mongers as 'Hindus', it suggested that this was the work of 'naughty-minded interested parties' – an expression that enabled the editorial to avoid pointing fingers directly at Hindu propagandists.[148] Again, instead of accusing the government of failing to prevent the circulation of such rumours, the report merely drew its attention to them and expressed hope that the police would take immediate action.

Even on those occasions when some of these newspapers printed a strongly-worded article, it always contained an endorsement of state action rather than a critique of government. In July 1948, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* had claimed that Calcutta Police had unearthed 'an organized conspiracy' and an 'espionage ring' of Calcutta's Muslims in support of 'Hyderabad's gangsters'.[149] Instead of challenging the *Patrika* head on, *Morning News* couched its attack in terms of praise for the West Bengal Government for its promptness in denying the veracity of this report. It suggested that the government should take 'deterrent action' against the *Patrika*. But instead of putting its demand across directly, it reminded the government that the Prime Minister himself had declared that 'communal peace' was India's 'essential requirement'. The implication was that *Morning News*, on its own, was not urging the punishment of its

[148] *Azad*, 24 July 1948. Newspaper clipping, K.P.M. No. 3497/08, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1948), SBR, CP.
[149] *Morning News*, 29 July 1948, ibid.

rival; it was the Prime Minister's statement that made it incumbent upon the government to take action.

Sometimes, while reporting actual outbreaks of communal violence, a non-antagonistic tenor became difficult to sustain. Yet the narrative strategies of such news reports continued to showed considerable restraint. During the festival of Holi in March 1949, a communal riot broke out in Kankinara in the 24-Parganas district on the outskirts of Calcutta. A long report in one such 'Muslim' newspaper expressed outrage, but never described it as a Hindu-Muslim conflict.[150] Instead, it invoked the rhetoric of majority-minority, secularism and democracy to condemn the violence – categories that newspapers with a 'Hindu' audience rarely used at that time. Instead of stating facts on its own authority, the report adhered strictly to official data and statements of the Premier and other government bodies. Lamenting administrative lapses, it pointed out that official information confirmed that the District Magistrate did not visit the site of violence to reassure minorities; even the police had allegedly sided with the aggressors. While it urged the government to bring the guilty to book, the report strove not to present this as a 'Muslim' demand. It insisted that this was a 'sacred duty' of government that every 'peace-loving' member of the public who valued 'communal harmony' wished the authorities to fulfil. The report further pointed out that 'minorities' in Kankinara had not celebrated their religious festivals out of fear for the past year. In fact, not one religious festival passed without an outbreak of communal violence in West Bengal. This only proved, the report concluded, that a

[150] Newspaper clipping, name of newspaper illegible, 19 March 1949, K.P.M. No. 3497/08, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1948), SBR, CP. Translation mine. The term '*laukik rashtra*' used in the report literally translates as 'people's government'. But I have at times translated it as 'democratic state' when it fitted the context better.

section of the public had not ‘absorbed’ the values of ‘secularism’ and ‘people’s government’ – ideals for which Mahatma Gandhi, ‘the father of the nation’, had sacrificed his life. It urged the government to launch a campaign among this section of the public to explain to them the need for ‘religious tolerance’ in a ‘democratic state’. This was essential, the writer pointed out, to preserve the international reputation of India.

This report is a classic example of how Muslim minorities attempted to fit in to the changed situation. It was the Muslim press that, after partition, turned out to be the most vociferous upholders of the values that Congress nationalism, and now the Indian nation-state, formally upheld – secularism, religious tolerance, democracy, people’s government and so on. One of the strategies of survival of the Muslim minorities, therefore, was to make moral claims for accommodation within the nation based on its own declared values – values that they felt were being violated by the majority community.

It is possible to appreciate the tenor of this criticism only when it is compared with the systematic assaults on religious and cultural freedom that the Hindu majority (with its new-found influence within the structures of governance) unleashed on the Muslim minority. As the previous newspaper report pointed out, not one religious festival had passed without the outbreak of communal violence in some area or another in West Bengal. Holi, in particular, led to localized violence in Calcutta almost every year since 1947. Sometimes, it would begin with petty fights, even among children. In one case, it began when a Hindu boy threw coloured water on a Muslim passer-by. This soon spread all over the locality, leading to a full-fledged clash between groups of

Hindus and Muslims.[151] In another case, a scuffle around the throwing of coloured water resulted in a full-fledged gang war in Manicktola.[152] The exact details of the incident remain unclear, but the real cause of conflict seemed to revolve around the question of which gang had the right to terrorize Muslims of the area. Bagla, a 'notorious criminal', had allegedly thrown coloured water on a Muslim in Manicktola; this had led to a fight with local Muslims, when one of Bagla's associates stabbed one of his opponents. Batu, the leader of a rival gang called 'Bharat Jatia Bahini' ('Indian National Army'), took exception to Bagla's actions, probably because he thought that the latter was encroaching upon his sphere of influence. A free fight ensued, which involved the use of firearms. When compared to this 'routine violence'[153] against Calcutta's Muslims, the tone of Muslim newspapers seems very tame indeed.

Even when no communal violence actually took place, police reported tension in Muslim localities in anticipation of a communal clash during religious festivities. This often started with rumours about how Hindus were preparing for an attack. This was not a new trend; it had been much in evidence even before partition. For example, even in March 1947, police reported a widespread rumour of an impending Hindu attack on Muslims on Holi.[154] What was new, however, was the anticipation of retaliatory violence on religious festivals, when rumours travelled from East Bengal of how

[151] Special Branch Report entitled 'Re: Clash between a group of Hindus and Muslims over throwing of colour near Kilia Tangra 3rd Lane on 14.3.49', 15 March 1949, K.P.M. No. 3498/08, S.B. File No. 506/49, P.M. (1949), SBR, CP.
[152] 'Statement of a Casual Agent', 25 March 1948, K.P.M. No. 1489/05, S.B. File No. 506 II, P.M. (1948), SBR, CP; also see Confidential Diary Entry by S.I. H.M. Bhattacharya of S.B., Calcutta, dated 3 April 1948, ibid.
[153] Pandey, *Routine Violence*.
[154] 'Special Branch Officer's Report: Communal Situation in Calcutta', 5 March 1947, K.P.M. No. 01488/05, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.

Hindu festivals were obstructed by Muslims there.[155] In November 1947, for example, intelligence officers reported panic among the Muslims of Beliaghata and Narkeldanga because of a rumour that Hindus would obstruct Muharrum processions and attack Muslims in Calcutta to avenge the violence that had erupted in Dacca around the Janmashtami processions.[156] News of incidents on the other side of the border often reached the ears of Calcutta's Muslim minorities before they arrived through official channels. These often caused tremors in Muslim neighbourhoods as fear of retaliatory violence gripped entire localities. In September 1948, as the first streams of information about a riot in Dacca were pouring into official circles in Calcutta, the Special Branch found, quite ominously, that the details of the riot were already well-known among Muslims around Sealdah railway station – the entry point of Hindu refugees from East Bengal into Calcutta.[157]

If an information deficit about incidents on the other side of the border hindered police efforts at keeping communal violence at bay, anti-Muslim bias, going down right to the bottom of the police hierarchy, facilitated pervasive everyday anti-Muslim violence that reinforced the cultural subordination of Calcutta's Muslims. One example will illustrate the point. A letter to the editor of *Paschim Banga Patrika* by one Santi Chatterjee complained of how an immersion procession following Saraswati

[155] I have argued elsewhere that rumour did not necessarily mean 'false' information. In bureaucratic parlance, rumour often meant information circulating through informal channels that made them almost impossible to verify. Thus, rumours of violence in East Bengal did not necessarily imply that the information was untrue. See Ishan Mukherjee, 'The Elusive Chase: "War Rumour" in Calcutta during the Second World War' in Tanika Sarkar and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (eds.), *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades*, New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2014, pp. 65-92.
[156] 'Communal Affairs', 14 November 1947, K.P.M. No. 1489/05, S.B. File No. 506 II, P.M. (1948), SBR, CP.
[157] Confidential Diary entry by S.I. A.C. Bhattacharya of S.B., Calcutta, dated 20 September 1948, K.P.M. No. 3497/08, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1948), SBR, CP.

Puja in February 1949 desperately tried to provoke Muslims at Maulali Darga.[158] Prayers at the Darga were being held when this band of rowdy *lathi*-wielding Hindu young men passed by, burning crackers and playing loud music. A car full of police-men, Chatterjee complained, stood by and watched the *tamasha*. The report attracted the attention of high officials and the Special Branch sent it to the local police station for comment. The response was a complete denial of the report. The concerned Assis-tant Commissioner claimed that he was himself at the spot; when he saw the proces-sion coming near the Darga, he requested them to stop making noise; this, he claimed, had an immediate effect and the procession passed by in silence.[159] He said that there were, indeed, other processions that played music, but all of these were far away from the shrine. The Special Branch did not feel the need to investigate the matter further and informed the Governor's office that all allegations in the letter printed by *Paschim Banga Patrika* were false.[160] This was despite the fact that the Assistant Commissioner admitted that the processionists were carrying *lathis*. The fact that this was unnecessary, especially during Saraswati Puja celebrations, and that it could be a sign of majoritarian muscle-flexing, did not bother the police establishment at all. As long as it was Hindus, and not Muslims, who were showing off their power, the local administration remained silent.

It would not be pushing the point too far to argue that the local state apparatus promoted Hindu socio-cultural dominance. Local state agencies had historically toler-

[158] *Darga* is a Muslim shrine, mostly belonging to Sufi denominations. *Paschim Banga Patrika*, 5 February 1949, newspaper cutting, K.P.M. No. 3498/08, S.B. File No. 506/49, P.M. (1949), SBR, CP.
[159] Report of Assistant Commissioner on the incident near Maulali Darga, dated 13 February 1949, ibid.
[160] Deputy Commissioner, Special Branch to the Secretary to the Governor of West Bengal, Home Department, 27 February 1949.

ated large domains of informal social dominance so long as it did not threaten the veneer of 'public order'.[161] Local state functionaries in Calcutta, now overwhelmingly Hindu in their social profile, considered Hindu majoritarian dominance quite acceptable, if this cowed the Muslim minority to the point that a superficial 'peace' prevailed.

The trouble was that this veneer of 'peace' repeatedly broke down. Hindu dominance did not stop only at symbolic assertions of power. Assaults, stabbings and murders of Muslims had become so regular, even so unspectacular, that they hardly drew public attention. In November 1947, for example, the Special Branch reported how, on two different occasions, a Muslim hand-cart puller and a Muslim hawker were mercilessly stabbed.[162] The police could only guess which gangs could have been involved and failed to bring anyone to book. On another occasion, four young Hindu men stopped a Muslim toy bird seller while he was on his way home. One of them engaged him over the price of his goods, when another stabbed him in the back.[163] Again, another police report described how two young men brutally stabbed a 'tea distributor' without any provocation whatsoever.[164] It is clear that Hindu criminals almost always targeted the most vulnerable sections of the Muslim poor and they executed the stabbings and murders with so much unnecessary cruelty that it made these acts degradingly unheroic.

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[161] This argument has been forcefully put forward in Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, 'Customs of Governance: Colonialism and Democracy in Twentieth Century India', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2007, pp. 441-470. Also see Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c.1850-1950*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

[162] 'Communal Affairs', undated but sometime in early November 1947, K.P.M. No. 01488/05, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1947), SBR, CP.

[163] 'Confidential Report of incidents on 22.7.48', 23 July 1948, K.P.M. No. 3497/08, S.B. File No. 506/48, P.M. (1948), SBR, CP.

[164] 'Report of Incident on 28.7.48', 29 July 1948, ibid. Also, 'Stabbing Incident', 30 July 1948, ibid.

Conclusion

In January 1950, the Union Parliament adopted the Constitution of free India, which declared that the new nation was a democratic republic. It guaranteed equal rights to all citizens, and inaugurated a regime based on joint electorates and universal adult franchise. Only a month later, however, Calcutta plunged into communal mayhem once more. The precise details of the incidents that triggered this violence remain shrouded in allegations and counter-allegations by both Indian and Pakistani governments. It is usually attributed to 'police actions' in East Bengal, one against communist activists in Kalshira village of Khulna district,[165] and the other against Santhal share-croppers in Rajshahi district.[166] Whatever initial causes there may have been, given the persistent hate campaign and structural violence unleashed against Calcutta's Muslim minority, the flare-up did not come as a surprise to anyone.[167] The violence resulted in a mass exodus across the eastern borders of the Radcliffe Line. It also gave a fillip to the processes of ghettoization and subordination of Muslims that had been going on ever since partition. Thus, before the leaders of independent India promised democracy based upon universal adult franchise and legal equality, a slow insidious process of marginalization had already reduced Calcutta's Muslims to a vulnerable minority, whose very status as Indian citizens was rendered questionable. This chapter attempted to delineate some aspects of this process which ensured the domi-

[165] See Badruddin Umar, *Purba Banglar Bhasha Andolan O Tatkalin Rajniti*, vol. 2, second edition, Dhaka: Jatiya Grantha Prakashan, 1996, p. 228; Anjan Kumar Ghosh, 'Partial Truths: Rumour and Communal Violence in South Asia, 1946-92', PhD Thesis, University of Michigan, 1998, p. 89; Bandyopadhyay, *Decolonization in South Asia*, pp. 49-50.

[166] See Sukumar Biswas and Hiroshi Sato, 'Religion and Politics in Bangladesh and West Bengal', Joint Research Programme Series No. 99, Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economics, 1993, pp. 34-41; Ghosh, 'Partial Truths', pp. 89-90; Bandyopadhyay, *Decolonization in South Asia*, p. 50.

[167] See *Sree Ashutosh Lahiri: Jibanbyapi Atmatyager Kahini*, Calcutta, December 1951, p. 16, Ashutosh Lahiri Papers, Pamphlets, Serial No. 69, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

nance of India's (predominantly Hindu) leadership over a docile Muslim minority who would not come in their way, and enabled them to observe constitutional niceties without jeopardizing their dominance.

Yet electoral democracy in India did eventually create the space for Muslims to negotiate their way into positions of power and influence, often taking advantage of the relentless factional squabbles within the Congress. As Joya Chatterji has shown, a new kind of 'Muslim politics' emerged in Calcutta from the mid-1950s, which, despite often being deeply conservative, did not reduce Muslims to a mere 'vote-bank'.[168]

The story that this chapter has tried to tell is of the systematic subjugation of Muslim minorities in Calcutta, which structured the nature of Muslim life and politics in the decades to come. For that reason, the narrative does remain one of majoritarian oppression. This, however, does not preclude the possibilities of personal bonds and sympathies between individuals of different communities in everyday life, neither does it deny the existence of some efforts at more organized forms of resistance towards minority oppression. However, this chapter has elucidated how structural violence was inaugurated under the auspices of the new regime at the point of its very birth, and how the rapid emergence of an administrative machinery of the nation-state reduced Muslims to a vulnerable minority. Undoubtedly, this project met with only limited success, as India's post-colonial history testifies.

[168] Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition*, pp. 194-208.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to understand the nature of transition from 'the colonial to the post-colonial' in South Asia through a study of mass politics in Calcutta. It focuses on five short years, from the end of the Second World War, to 1950, when the Parliament of independent India adopted a constitution which declared the new nation-state to be a democratic republic. This constitution affirmed India's commitment to guarantee equal rights to all its citizens irrespective of their status, personal beliefs and community affiliations. This thesis has tried to demonstrate how the transitional state, itself a product of the process of the transition, intervened to restructure social (and political) relations prior to the adoption of these lofty constitutional ideals.

Decolonization has been described, broadly speaking, in two ways. One charts a linear trajectory of progress towards a brighter future – from post-war upheavals under colonial rule towards a regime of equal citizenship under the nation-state. The second turns the lens back to front: telling a story of progressive deterioration, from the impact of war and famine to riots, displacements, and refugee formations. In this second grand narrative, the inauguration of the nation-state marks an intensification of social control and an elaboration of the coercive institutions of government. Both the characterizations are caricatures, of course: serious historical scholarship has complicated both narratives in a variety of ways. Yet these grand themes have left their mark as referents in all such scholarly exercises. This thesis does not claim to be an exception, although it has sought to intervene and challenge some of the assumptions that have hitherto undergirded the historiography.

To begin with, the thesis expresses discomfort with the way some historians have identified two distinct 'types' of mass action in this period – 'cross-communal, anti-colonial' and 'communal' - holding that these are mutually opposed forms of political expression, each with distinctive characteristics. In the first, camaraderie between different communal groups – particularly 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' – is much in evidence, and historians assume that it follows that different communities joined hands in a fight to free themselves from the oppressions of colonial rule. In the second type of mass politics, Hindus and Muslims are understood to have fought each other. In the analysis of this second type of mass action, criticism of the state usually remains confined to the charge of inaction, or of active communal bias on the part of its functionaries.

This thesis has challenged this dual categorization. It shows that it is impossible to rescue a pure moment of 'cross-communal, anti-colonial' solidarity in the last years of the Raj – whether during large-scale street demonstrations or in quotidian life. The first two chapters deal with spectacular mass agitations in protest against trials of Indian National Army (INA) officers. Historians have previously presented these as moments of 'cross-communal, anti-colonial' solidarity, when Hindus and Muslims came together to question the right of the colonial state to hold trials against a 'national' army. The thesis, through a close study of hitherto unexplored archives, has shown that such claims are unsustainable. Communal fractures and intra-party intrigues played a part in the way the protests unfolded. Again, in the subsequent chapters, the thesis has tried to identify a long-term, slow process of break-down in inter-community relations. It shows that communal antagonism and hostility remained a

facet of everyday life even during the period when historians have assumed united anti-colonial action to be the dominant mood music in mass politics.

In rejecting these binary categories of popular action, the thesis has opened up a critique of the received chronologies of popular politics in this era. Scholars have divided post-war mass politics into two time-periods. The initial months after the Second World War, they assume, were marked by Hindu-Muslim solidarity in street action. Both communities are said to have embraced the same causes, and staged spectacular street action against the colonial state. However, in their analysis, the tide seems to have suddenly taken a dramatic turn: the sub-continent plunged into a riotous blood-bath as Hindus and Muslims (and Sikhs) began killing each other in communal frenzy.

This thesis rejects this periodization which does not bear historical scrutiny. It argues for a slow and steady rise in the virulence of communal tension and violence over a longer time-frame.

Another goal of the thesis was to understand the nature of crisis in the state that this transition precipitated. Historians have given it many labels – freedom, independence, decolonization, and transfer of power being some of those more frequently used. This thesis has distanced itself from using the rather tired argument about whether 'freedom' is a better framework than 'decolonization'. Instead, it focuses tightly on understanding the precise processes of change that state institutions underwent, and how the state came to be imagined in political action, both spectacular and quotidian. Instead of presupposing the nature of this transformation by an *a priori* choice of one

of these labels (which is invariably limiting), this thesis used the technique of thick description of the historical material to arrive at some of its conclusions. In so doing, this thesis has argued that the transitional state at this historical conjuncture is best understood as a profound crisis in the 'sublime imaginary' of the state.

The thesis deploys a conceptual frame-work that draws upon Timothy Mitchell's proposition that modern institutions of state power, in the process of creating disciplined governmentalized populations, simultaneously produce a 'state effect'. This makes the dispersed, polymorphous state institutions appear to be a coherent, larger-than-life, all-powerful, entity in popular perception. However, given that the disciplinary project of modern governmentalized institutions and structures of power always remains incomplete and susceptible to challenges, the 'state effect' it produces must also be perpetually vulnerable. In order to understand how, despite such vulnerability, the impression of a singular all-powerful state is sustained in the public domain, the thesis refers to Thomas Blom Hansen's concept of the 'imagined state'. Hansen has shown that the state is imagined through a 'constitutive split' between its 'sublime' and 'profane aspects'. When state actors indulge in corruption or connive in majoritarian violence, these acts are relegated in public perception to its 'profane' aspects. In such a situation, Hansen argues, the 'sublime' dimensions of the state, in the form of inquiry commissions or judicial institutions, imagined as repositories of a higher reason and impartial justice, are called upon to stabilize the state's imaginary as the ultimate repository of power. This thesis suggests that the moment of transition from the colonial to the post-colonial order can broadly be understood as a crisis in both 'profane' and 'sublime' imaginaries of the state. At the same time, it recognizes that any reduction of the transitional state's manifestations into a 'sublime'/'profane' binary

necessarily involves an oversimplification that is impossible to sustain on closer historical scrutiny. In this, the thesis stands in agreement with new historical scholarship on the everyday state, which emphasizes the complexity, messiness and incoherence of the process of transition to post-colonial nationhood.

The first chapter, which deals with the first Red Fort trial of three INA officers, shows how the government's efforts at staging court martial proceedings under full public scrutiny met with catastrophic failure. Rather than hailing the government for its commitment to fair judicial procedures, protesters themselves staged spectacles through street action. This was repeated in the case of protests against Rashid Ali's 'unfair' sentence. In the case of communal violence, propagandists publicly proclaimed their lack of confidence in government-appointed commissions of inquiry to deliver justice to the riot victims. Again, rebellion within Calcutta police, the alleged misdeeds of some policemen, and government's failure to punish the guilty personnel, the fourth chapter has shown, fatally damaged the 'state effect' in public eyes. The last chapter has shown how political leaders at the helm of the new nation-state attempted to reclaim public confidence in state institutions, even by falling back upon Mahatma Gandhi's moral influence.

In terms of methodology, this thesis has attempted to address some of the issues raised by social anthropologists, whose works have been a key influence in the recent historiography of the everyday state. A persistent concern for anthropologists of the state has been to grapple with the problem of how one may study the conceptions of the 'state' as a trans-local entity through ethnographies rooted in a locality. This thesis has tried to address this issue through a micro-historical approach. One fundamental

question that has animated this thesis is how to understand the transitional state, implicated in grand processes of imperial disengagement and constitution-making, by focusing on the street politics of a single city.

Some recent studies of decolonization have argued in favour of a long-term view of the processes of disengagement of European empires from their erstwhile colonies. Though such studies have yielded important insights, the thesis reiterates the value of a micro-historical approach, and the importance of fine-grained local studies of quotidian life and everyday state action located at the moment of formal imperial disengagement. Such a focus can reveal patterns in the process of decolonization that escape more sweeping *longue duree* studies of the end of empire across time and space.

The thesis raises several issues that it could not address. One of the most pressing of these is the applicability of this model of state crises to other spatial and temporal locations. How does the nature of crisis of state power during decolonization in South Asia compare with imperial disengagements in other parts of the world? What contribution can such localized studies of regime-change in one part of the world make to our understanding of similar processes elsewhere? The second set of questions pertain to its applicability across time. Can we locate similar crises of state power during regime change in other historical periods? Is this nature of crises peculiar to European imperial disengagements, or can it be generalized to other kinds of moments of end of empire at other points of time? This brings us to the vexed issue of the relationship between the nature of the particular state crisis delineated in the thesis and ‘modernity’?

Thomas Blom Hansen says that the 'constitutive split' in the imaginary of the state between its 'sublime' and 'profane' aspects can be traced to ideas in Roman law. Yet he is careful to point out that this conception of the state struck root in India via colonialism. Such a conception of state, therefore, was very much a product of 'colonial modernity'. This is affirmed by Timothy's Mitchell's formulation of the 'state effect'; it is the effect of modern forms of disciplinary power that conjures up this idea of a homogeneous, all-powerful entity identifiable as 'the state'. It is unlikely, therefore, that the particular type of state crises with which this thesis is concerned can be generalized to create a model for regime changes in pre-modern times. In what ways, then, does state crises during similar situations in the pre-modern world differ from the patterns this research throws up?

Perhaps, the most pressing question of all is whether a similar crisis of state power is possible in a neo-liberal world order, when governments of nation states do not aim to project the state as an all-powerful entity, or as the ultimate repository of sovereignty, justice or reason. What happens in contexts when state actors actively try to present the state as a mere rational facilitator of global capital flows? What implication does it have for the nature of state crises when states no longer even pretend to act as protectors of its people from injustice and oppression, when they suggest that the panacea for all human problems lie in the free movement of and a deeper penetration of global capital? These are questions that I hope this thesis will encourage future historians to ponder.

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